

# **The Emotional Lives and Legacies of Fathers and Sons in Britain, 1945-1974**

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Dissertation abstract.

My doctoral dissertation is an oral history of men who respectively became fathers, or experienced childhood and adolescence, in the generation after the Second World War. Histories of the family have tended to focus on women's roles in the home; but recent work by historians of masculinity has sought to re-establish men's places as attentive, even devotional fathers. Putting 'sonhood' on an equal footing with fatherhood, I assess the traction of such narratives for men *and boys* in post-war British families by examining how masculinity was reproduced generationally. Focusing on age and the life-course, my analysis cuts across boundaries of social class and regional background, drawing on a range of common emotional expressions, from love, pride and reverence to guilt, resentment and fear. I assess fathers and sons' changing experiences of parenting, education, work and leisure, as well as society and culture more broadly, all of which, I argue, contribute to the way post-war filial relationships unfolded in families.

My main conclusions are fourfold. First, I argue that men's ongoing – and in many respects revived – breadwinning obligations after 1945 combined with persistent cultural expectations to ensure that fathers' attention towards their families remained partial and conditional. Second, even when at home, men were frequently inclined to spend their leisure time alone rather than in the company of their families. Third, that post-war fathers' expectations and aspirations for their children tended to be more generalised and open-ended than in earlier generations. I argue that this change coincided with a cultural shift towards the valuing of individuality and self-fulfilment for the younger generation, which was negotiated with a variety of outcomes. Finally, I suggest that in so far as fathers and children were becoming closer in the post-war decades, they were becoming so chiefly over the course of familial and biological, rather than socio-cultural chronologies. Consequently, their intergenerational relationships were heavily influenced by particular interpersonal dynamics, the consideration of which leads to a wider picture of emotional ambiguity and ambivalence.

# Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

# Acknowledgements

This dissertation has benefitted from the thoughts, advice, support and input of a number of people over the course of its inception. I am grateful to members of the New York and Cambridge Training Collaboration (NYCTC) community, whose range and depth of insight contributed greatly to my intellectual approach. I have also learned an enormous amount from the generous audiences at the various conferences, workshops seminars in which I have been fortunate to share works in progress. They have included the Institute of Historical Research Life-Cycles Seminar, the Social History Society conference, the Oral History Society conference, the Children's History Society conference, and the 'Seen but not Heard' children's history conference at Sussex. Also, the 'Emotions: Polemics' conference, the Emotions Summer School, the Gender History Workshop, and the Modern Cultural History Seminar, all at Cambridge. And, most recently, the Twentieth-century Masculinities workshop at Birmingham. I am also grateful to the undergraduate students at the University of Cambridge, King's College London and Edge Hill College, whose engagement with my work during seminars has contributed to my analysis and interpretations. A version of Chapter One has been adapted for an article in the Oral History Journal; I owe a debt of gratitude to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their comments.

I am profoundly indebted to my supervisor, Lucy Delap. Not only has she provided consistently incisive criticism, she has also remained an enthusiastic advocate of my research within and beyond Cambridge. I am an immeasurably better historian as a result of our supervisions and her all-round support. My secondary supervisor, Simon Sleight has provided similarly astute and constructive feedback, as well as being a generous supporter of my work. I am greatly thankful to them both.

Finally, I want to thank my family. Had they been alive to witness it, my mum and dad would have been proud and dumbfounded in equal measure that I somehow conspired to submit a PhD at Cambridge. Their influence remains uniquely formative in ways too numerous to mention. My dad, who himself returned to academia in his late thirties, probably never imagined how much of a role model he was to become.

My daughter, Irma, has shown patience and support well beyond her years. She has understood the all too familiar phrase 'daddy's working' with remarkable grace. Indeed, she has never yet known a daddy who is not studying for a PhD. It has been my wife, Kathryn, who has been unconditionally on hand to distract her. I simply would not have been able to complete this dissertation without her endless stream of emotional and practical support.

My history of fathers and sons in families stems, inseparably, from my perspective as a father, son and family member.

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# Introduction

This is an oral history of fathers and sons in 14 families. They lived in regions across Britain, in cities, towns and villages; from the south coast to Scotland, the northwest to the midlands and London. All of the fathers were married; one was divorced, one widowed, and one died early (I interviewed his two sons). All of the sons had siblings and all but one had gone on to have children of their own. The families came from a range of social backgrounds. Of the fathers, there were two farmers, a motor mechanic, a builder, three naval engineers, a mechanical engineer, two foremen, a pattern maker, a major general, a teacher, and a window cleaner. Every one of their experiences was profoundly – though not only – shaped by the intergenerational succession of male breadwinning. This dissertation explores the intersubjective dynamics of these fathers' relationships with their sons, which make up culturally and emotionally freighted, yet underexplored, aspects of post-war British social history.

Occupational status across generations is a useful, though limited, measure of social mobility.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, in these terms, we can see that some fathers had ascended from their fathers' social positions; some had remained working, middle, or upper-middle-class. Of the sons, some had ascended again, others succeeded their fathers in similar status jobs, and two experienced what could be described as downward social mobility. Five sons passed the 11-plus examination – which greatly improved their chances of going to grammar school – and six failed. Four were not required to take it at all (two of whom were educated in the private sector). As fathers and sons, each of their relationships was uniquely distinct from the others; however, in every family, the older generation became a parent, and the younger generation experienced childhood and adolescence, in the decades following the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the limitations of using male work as a measure of social class, see Annemette Sorensen, 'Women, Family and Class' in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 20 (1994).

<sup>2</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, there are numerous ways to define 'generation'. The average age of a first-time father in 1974 was 29, which provides a demographic punctuation mark for my periodisation. 'Births by Parents' Characteristics in England and Wales 2015', <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2015> [Accessed November 2018].

As we shall also see, in many respects, the early 1970s saw the idealised 'nuclear family model' of the 1950s and 1960s begin to be dismantled.

As a sample, these fathers and sons are by no means representative of post-war society. At some level, they are representative of no more than their experiences as gendered social agents who all lived through a particular period of British history. But representivity is illusory when writing an intimate history of people's emotional lives. As James Hinton has argued, 'the more one knows about any particular individual, the less they can be used to illustrate some more general experience or theme'.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, these father-son experiences can be located in historical contexts; their narrations tell us about how they conceived of themselves in those contexts; and the conclusions we draw can enrich our understandings of the contexts themselves. As we shall see, I have found particular utility in locating these narratives alongside contemporaneous social studies, which provide rich insight into post-war family life on a larger scale. I will outline my methodological approach in more detail in Chapter One. The story of these men's emotional lives and legacies belongs to the historiography on masculinity, the family and generations. This introduction locates my research in the literature in each of these areas in turn, before outlining the structure and content of the rest of the dissertation.

## **1. Masculinity, Breadwinning and Subjectivity**

A history of fathers and sons is necessarily a history of masculinity. Much of the historiography on masculinity in the modern British context has proceeded from Michael Roper and John Tosh's 1991 collection, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*.<sup>4</sup> As the name promised, the collection asserted a place for men (and boys) as gendered subjects in a range of historical settings.<sup>5</sup> Roper and Tosh argued that masculinity, like femininity, is relational, and 'shaped in relation to men's social power'.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, as Joan Scott had urged some years earlier, they sought to move away from studies of gender moored only to ideas of patriarchy and the determinist underpinnings

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<sup>3</sup> James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (OUP, 2010), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (Routledge, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Roper and Tosh (1991) 'Introduction: Historians and the Politics of Masculinity' in *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



of male dominance such studies implied.<sup>7</sup> Rather, they recognised that male psychic wellbeing and social relationships did not always benefit from masculine power, nor indeed the perpetuation of that power.<sup>8</sup> As they acknowledged, the move to dissociate 'masculinity' from 'male dominance' was not new;<sup>9</sup> however, *Manful Assertions* was the first of its kind to collect together studies of historically contingent male representations and experiences, with the complexity and vulnerability of men's and boys' gendered identities on show. By illustrating this in a range of historical settings, it confirmed that gender was absolutely an aspect of male subjectivity and social relations.

Nowhere have gender relations been more heavily scrutinised than across the messy intersection of public and private spheres of life. Since Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's agenda-setting work *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, 'separate spheres' has been a richly contested analytical framework.<sup>10</sup> Davidoff and Hall argued that the late-eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century saw 'separate spheres' become the 'common-sense of the middle class'.<sup>11</sup> This new status was a result of Christian evangelist concerns to delineate the purity of the home and the sinfulness of the outside world, the expectations for mothers to take the lead in raising children, and the exclusion of women from workplaces and access to political power.<sup>12</sup> Across the early-nineteenth century, it has been argued, 'separate spheres' was a middle-class privilege. Working-class men were denied political power, while their wives routinely worked out of necessity in order for their families to survive hardship and poverty.<sup>13</sup> However, by the second half of the century, the organising principle of separate spheres was also increasingly associated with ideas

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' in *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), p. 1057.

<sup>8</sup> Roper and Tosh, *Introduction: Historians and the Politics of Masculinity* pp. 6, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 6, 9-10, 16. For example, they cite Victor Seidler's writing in 'Achilles Heel', the 1970s men's movement magazine, in which he explores the idea of gender as an oppressive social structure for men as well as for women. They also cite Sheila Rowbotham's critique of patriarchy as biologically determinist; see Sheila Rowbotham (1981) 'The Trouble with Patriarchy' in Raphael Samuel (ed) *People's History and Socialist Theory* (Routledge, 1981), p. 365.

<sup>10</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (Routledge, 1987/2002).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. xv, 335; see also Ben Griffin, Lucy Delap and Abigail Wills (2009) 'Introduction: The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800' in Griffin, Delap and Wills (eds) *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Rivers Oram, 1995), p. 2.

of respectability, independence and manliness among working-class men, for whom providing for their families became a touchstone of adult masculinity.<sup>14</sup>

There is much to complicate separate spheres as a category of nineteenth century gender relations. For example, middle-class women were highly participant in civic politics and philanthropy, and their husbands had central roles in home and family lives.<sup>15</sup> In the working class, a majority of women were employed as domestic servants – their labour was located in *other people's homes* – and there were a number of working-class jobs in factories that became female dominated.<sup>16</sup> The extent to which the late-eighteenth century marked the advent of an 'emboldened' and distinct middle class has also been challenged.<sup>17</sup> But, as Davidoff and Hall maintained, though separate spheres remained the organisation of gender relations that had most resonance for the middle classes, in reality, 'public was not really public and private was not really private'.<sup>18</sup> For our purposes, it is not necessary to dwell any further on the rich and nuanced historiographical discussion on separate spheres, but to note that it remains the 'conceptual framework [which] has informed nearly all studies of domestic authority in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.<sup>19</sup> As we shall see, I will make the case that despite discussions of cross-class 'privatised' living and family-focused fathers in the post-Second World War decades, separate spheres retains its analytical purchase in the study of family life after 1945.

The conceptual division of public and private spheres of life has underpinned much of the literature on masculinity. With regard to enquiries into maleness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this division has centred on the separation of home from either work, service in the armed forces, or male leisure. In his 1999 path-breaking monograph, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England*,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 127; Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (2007) 'Introduction: The Empire of the Father' in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 7-8; Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England* (Routledge, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. xxiv; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England* (Yale, 1999), pp. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 33; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Amanda Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History' in *The Historical Journal*, 36 (2009), especially pp. 393-400.

<sup>18</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Griffin et al., *The Politics of Domestic Authority*, p. 5.

John Tosh famously invoked the phrase 'flight from domesticity' to mark a shift from men's mid-nineteenth century orientation towards their homes to the later lure of fantasy adventure and real-life colonial conquest.<sup>20</sup> Since then, historians of masculinity have explored the tension surrounding the relation between public and private spheres of male experience in a variety of settings. Such tensions have produced the contested yet persistent notion of masculinity in 'crisis', in which, for example, men negotiate the competing demands of outer bravado and inner emotional repression, physical strength and psychological vulnerability, civility and delinquency, or respectability and fecklessness.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on these dynamics and others, historians have written persuasively about the way domestic mentalities infiltrate public realms. These have included the House of Commons in the nineteenth century, the First World War trenches, mid-twentieth century public schools, post-war managerial workplace cultures, nineteenth century gentleman's clubs, and post-war working men's clubs.<sup>22</sup> Equally, there have been multiple examples of how the public realms of war and work have come to inform domestic identities. These have referenced work-related material culture and leisure in the home, fantasy escape to imaginary adventures (for men *and* boys) in books and films, or in post-traumatic psychological processes.<sup>23</sup> In short, there is ample evidence that public and private spheres are porous, but the binary organisation of men's experience has remained largely intact.

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<sup>20</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 6-7, 170-178; see also John Tosh (1991) 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class: The family of Edward White Benson' in Roper and Tosh (eds) *Manful Assertions*, pp. 65-68

<sup>21</sup> Frant Mort examines the utility of 'crisis' as an interpretive framework for studies of masculinity in Frank Mort, 'Crisis Points: Masculinities in History and Social Theory' in *Gender & History*, 6, pp. 124-125.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture, and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (CUP, 2012), especially Chapter Six; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan 2009), especially pp. 29-32; Peter Lewis (1991) 'Mummy, Matron and the Maids: Feminine Presence and Absence in Male Institutions, 1934-63' in Roper and Tosh (eds) *Manful Assertions*, especially p. 174; Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man Since 1945* (OUP, 1994); Amy Milne-Smith, 'A Flight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, 1880-1914' in *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), p. 798; Richard Hall, 'Being a Man, Being a Member: Masculinity and Community in Britain's Working Men's Clubs, 1945-1960' in *Cultural and Social History*, 14 (2017), pp. 73; 80-81.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War* (Yale, 2009); Joanna Bourke (2003) '"Going Home": The Personal Adjustment of British and American Servicemen after the War' in R. Bessel and D. Schumann (eds) *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (CUP, 2003), p. 152; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 63-65; 235-237; Martin Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War' in *Gender & History*, 19 (2007), p. 168; Michael Roper (1991) 'Product Fetishism and the British Company Man, 1945-85' in Roper and Tosh (eds) *Manful Assertions*, pp. 193-194.

Fundamental to the social organisation of public and private spheres has been the gendered relations of breadwinning and homemaking. In the course of the early nineteenth century, as it became more common for middle-class workplaces to be removed from the home, public, professional life operated mostly in male-dominated settings.<sup>24</sup> In terms of political enfranchisement, following the 1832 'Great Reform Act', the citizen sphere remained the domain only of propertied men.<sup>25</sup> However, the 1834 Poor Law legislation proclaimed all men solely responsible for the economic wellbeing of their families.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in cultural terms for the middle classes, and in legal terms across society, the gendering of breadwinning was laid bare. In reality, however, throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the wage-earning demands on working-class women to supplement – in many cases supplant – their husbands' income was substantial.<sup>27</sup> Whether motivated by assertions of male dominance, or the protection of working-class families' well-being (women's wages undercut men's, so driving down household incomes), first the Chartists, then the trade unions, sought to confirm breadwinning as a male endeavour.<sup>28</sup> As Sonya Rose has illustrated with reference to carpet weavers in the 1880s, so essential was breadwinning to notions of manliness, men were not beyond begging for work at women's wages rather than be supported by their wives and daughters.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the century, whether in middle-class or working-class families, male breadwinning, with the implication of female dependence, was the central aspiration of sons as they came of age.<sup>30</sup>

The first of only two monographs on fathers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Julie-Marie Strange's *Fatherhood and the British Working Class 1865-1914*, also has breadwinning centre stage. Strange describes financial provision as the 'legal, political, social and affective keystone of fatherhood'.<sup>31</sup> Using sociological and linguistic

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<sup>24</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. xv, 18-21; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, pp. 7, 267-268.

<sup>26</sup> Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Sonya Rose summarises this debate in *ibid.*, p. 131. For the two alternate perspectives, see Heidi Hartmann, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex' in *Signs*, 1 (1976); Jane Humphries, 'Class struggle and the persistence of the working-class family' in *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1 (1977). See also Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, pp. 266-268.

<sup>29</sup> Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> Keith McClelland (1991) 'Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-80' in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds) *Manful Assertions*, p. 81; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>31</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (2015), pp. 80-81.

techniques to great effect to perform close analyses of working-class autobiography, Strange makes a number of provocative observations concerning the relation between public and private spheres of men's experience.<sup>32</sup> She foregrounds, for example, the father's chair, which was at the 'liminal' nexus of work and home life, upon which children would sit on knees and stroke beards when fathers returned from their labour; or the humour of family conversations, in which fathers' sensitivities would be revealed and emotional problems negotiated.<sup>33</sup> However, perhaps Strange's most powerful intervention is the idea of 'devotional absence'. She suggests that men's detainment with their work was richly symbolic of their filial love and care, the extremes of which were accentuated by the brutality of hard labour and the search for it.<sup>34</sup> This conceptualization of working-class male absence as devotional is a counterpoint to histories of the family that have prioritized women's experiences, viewing men as at best no more than respectable, and at worst feckless, drunken wife-beaters.<sup>35</sup> Like Trevor Broughton and Helen Rogers' edited collection had, Strange did for working-class fathers what Tosh had done for their middle-class counterparts: offered a history of nineteenth century domestic masculinity which reassessed and nuanced the idea of the Victorian authoritarian patriarch.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Strange's revisionism confirmed that Victorian and Edwardian working-class masculinity was wholly compatible with fatherly intimacy and affection.

I will argue in this dissertation that the presence of devotional and intimate, alongside distant or neglectful, performances of fatherhood over the nineteenth and

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Strange uses Esther Demott's 'structural' and 'intrinsic' definitions of interpersonal relationships in families to explore the relationship between provision and affection. She also examines the subtle significance of 'to me' and 'for me' formulations in children's accounts of their fathers' public and private statuses. *Ibid.*, Chapter Two; p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter Three; Chapter Five.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, especially pp. 70-74.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 5-6, 84. On the preoccupation with women's lives in families, see, for example, Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (MUP, 1988); Jane Lewis, *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Blackwell, 1986); Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford 1984); Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918* (OUP, 1993). On the tendency to portray working-class men as feckless, see Lynn Abrams, "There was Nobody like my Daddy': Fathers, the Family and the Marginalisation of Men in Modern Scotland" in *The Scottish Historical Review*, 78 (1999), pp. 220-221.

<sup>36</sup> Broughton and Rogers, *The Empire of the Father*, pp. 5-6; see also Joanne Bailey, 'The History of Mum and Dad: Recent Historical Research on Parenting in England from the 16th to 20th centuries' in *History Compass*, 12 (2014), p. 499.

early-twentieth centuries represented antecedents to a similarly capacious spectrum of masculinities after 1945. I will also suggest that we might modify the idea of 'devotional absence' for the post-war period. As we shall see, after the Second World War, men remained absent at work for long periods fulfilling their breadwinner obligations; however, I will argue, they were also routinely 'absent presences' in family homes, engaged in home-oriented leisure pursuits, such as DIY, which were, in general, undertaken alone.<sup>37</sup>

In chronological terms, Laura King's *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c.1914-1960*, which is the only other monograph on fathers to cover the modern period, picks up where Strange left off.<sup>38</sup> However, King's is a broader cross-class socio-cultural history, which draws on an impressively wide range of sources, including diaries, letters, oral histories, social studies, government documents and advice literature. King dials down twentieth century men's breadwinning obligations; but, like Strange, she seeks to offer a corrective to histories that have elided the roles of 'husband' and 'father', flattening multiple performances of masculinity in families. Her idea of 'family-oriented masculinity' is presented as a more capacious interpretive framework through which to resolve these tendencies for fathers in the twentieth century. King has great ambitions for fathers across the mid-twentieth century, who 'were in general, held responsible for their children's emotional, intellectual, and physical development, through formal education but also informal interaction'.<sup>39</sup> Formal education ranged from help with homework, to investments in education insurance and private schools according to fathers' means;<sup>40</sup> informal interaction was engagement with play, which had found new legitimacy in discourses of mid-century childcare advice.<sup>41</sup> In short, while she acknowledges a plurality of experience, which manifested variously in opposition to and in agreement with cultural representation and expert discourse, King, like Strange before her, presents an approving assessment of modern British fatherhood. I would argue, however, that her contention that the

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<sup>37</sup> Leonore Davidoff uses this phrase to characterise the place of families in social history. Leonore Davidoff, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (Longman, 1999), p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c.1914-1960* (OUP, 2015),

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-39.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60; see also David Cowan, 'Modern' Parenting and the Uses of Childcare Advice in Post-war England' in *Social History*, 43 (2018).

period witnessed the move towards an increasingly 'family-oriented masculinity' among fathers owes most to her analysis of representations in culture, particularly the national press.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Strange, King argues for a clear pattern of change over time. Summing up her main intervention, she argues that 'the 1950s can be pinpointed as a moment of transformation in masculinity – it is clear that there were tensions and controversies surrounding this change, and that by no means all men embraced it, but a new, if fragile, family-oriented masculinity came to prominence'.<sup>43</sup> For example, she suggests that across the mid-century period fathers became more likely to be engaged in 'entertaining children' and 'helping mother', alongside their longstanding duties of 'provision', 'discipline' and 'guidance'.<sup>44</sup> To the extent that King documents a richness and plurality of experience, my findings concur with hers. However, I also want to complicate her teleology that sees men becoming ever-more engaged fathers over the course of the early to mid- twentieth century. In my view, this pattern underplays the extent of fatherly involvement in earlier periods and the continuing primacy of mothers in experiences of parenting after 1945.

In its place, my conclusions are fourfold. First, I argue that men's ongoing – and in many respects revived – breadwinning obligations after 1945 combined with persistent cultural expectations to ensure that fathers' attention towards their families remained partial and conditional. Second, even when at home, men's instincts were often not to spend leisure time in the company of their families. Third, I wish to amplify a pattern already identified by King: that post-war fathers' expectations and aspirations for their children tended to be more generalised and open-ended than in earlier generations.<sup>45</sup> I argue that this change coincided with a cultural shift towards the valuing of individuality and self-fulfilment for the younger generation, which was negotiated with a variety of outcomes. Finally, I want to offer an alternative chronology that traces the intersubjectivity of father-son relationships across life-courses. From

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 191.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 16; Tosh's nineteenth century fathers' roles had been provision, protection, authority, guidance, and discipline (without precluding tendencies to be playful and nurturing). See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 85-86, 89.

<sup>45</sup> King makes the point about generalised hopes and aspirations in King, *Family Men*, pp. 41-43.

this perspective, I argue that in so far as fathers and children were becoming closer in the post-war decades, they were becoming so chiefly over the course of familial and biological, rather than socio-cultural chronologies. Consequently, their intergenerational relationships were heavily influenced by particular interpersonal dynamics, which lead us to an overall picture of emotional ambiguity and ambivalence.

The broader literature on early to mid-twentieth century men in families presents a mixed picture, from which emerge loving and attentive, as well as distant and neglectful fathers. In all cases, however, such qualities were bound by the cultural and temporal demands of male breadwinning. Joanna Bourke and Elizabeth Roberts have each found evidence of men caring for young children in the inter-war period whether after their own working day or, more exceptionally, where their wives were the main breadwinners.<sup>46</sup> As Roberts and others have illustrated, however, in such cases where men did not adequately fulfil the role of main breadwinner for their families, whether for reasons of idleness, irregularity of work, or because their wives earned more, such circumstances were seen as transgressive and emasculating.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, Bourke suggests that working-class men might even have done more childcare in the 1890s than the 1950s, due to the effects of declining family sizes, and the provision of running water and gas stoves on the burdens of household chores.<sup>48</sup> The work of the progressive inter-war fathercraft movement did not go so far as to endorse men's involvement in the caring aspects of parenthood but, through 'fathers councils' in welfare clinics, encouraged fathers not to be physically or emotionally distant (though, as Fisher acknowledges, in any case, the advice has limited purchase).<sup>49</sup> Lynn Abrams argues that contrary to the stereotype of absence and fecklessness, as far as their work allowed,

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<sup>46</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 81-84; Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Open University, 1992), pp. 43-48; Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'The Politics of Preference: Masculinity, Marital Status and Unemployment Relief in Post-First World War Britain' in *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010); Marjorie Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare, and Masculine Citizenship: 'So Much Honest Poverty' in Britain, 1870-1930* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 118; Strange, *Fatherhood*, Chapter Two; John Tosh (2011) 'The History of Masculinity: an Outdated Concept?' in J.H. Arnold and S. Brady (eds) *What is Masculinity?: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*, p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> Tim Fisher, 'Fatherhood and the British Fathercraft Movement, 1919-39' in *Gender & History*, 17 (2005), p. 441.



working-class Scottish fathers in fact spent significant time with their children, walking with them, reading to them, bathing them and putting them to bed.<sup>50</sup>

In the generation following the Second World War, with male unemployment greatly reduced, and women's growing but only partial incursions into the workforce, male breadwinning had resumed its cultural pre-eminence after the disruption of wartime.<sup>51</sup> As the industrial period matured with the endurance of heavy industry, the growth of factory and office work, and the ongoing decline of agriculture, it was also highly likely that men's work would detain them in workplaces outside the home.<sup>52</sup> As Pat Ayres argues, breadwinning in the post-war period was 'the model of masculinity that encapsulated marriage and fatherhood'.<sup>53</sup> While King and others have argued that post-war affluence enabled many men to spend more of their wages on their families, they were also spending more time away from home to earn them.<sup>54</sup> By the mid-1960s, although the average working week had been reduced to just over 40 hours, overtime was so commonplace that the amount men actually worked on average was more than 47 hours, just as they had in 1920.<sup>55</sup> Many post-war social researchers were keen to celebrate 'modern' fathers' tendencies to push prams, bathe their children and read to them.<sup>56</sup> But as Angela Davis and others have argued, such depictions likely overstated men's roles in parenting.<sup>57</sup> There has also been a tendency to foreground twentieth century fathers who played with their children at their *leisure* in order to underscore

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<sup>50</sup> Abrams, *Daddy*, pp. 232-234.

<sup>51</sup> In 1971, the percentage of working-age men who were economically active remained high, at 91%, as the equivalent number for women had risen sharply, but only to 57%. Many of these had been full-time mothers for significant portions of their adult lives and were unlikely to earn as much as their husbands. See Ian Gazeley (2007) 'Manual Work and Pay, 1900-1970' in *Work and Pay in Twentieth-century Britain* (OUP, 2007), pp. 55-56. For discussion of the representation and experiences of women in the workforce over this period see Helen McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-war Britain' in *Women's History Review*, 26 (2017); Dolly Smith Wilson, 'A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain' in *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006). I will explore the gender dynamics of workforce participation in more detail in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

<sup>52</sup> Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell (2007) 'Introduction' in *Work and Pay in Twentieth-century Britain*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Pat Ayres, 'Work, Culture and Gender: The Making of Masculinities in Post-War Liverpool' in *Labour History Review*, 69 (2004), pp. 161-162.

<sup>54</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 191; See also Chapter Five.

<sup>55</sup> Gazeley, *Manual Work and Pay*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Elizabeth Newson and John Newson, *Four Years Old in an Urban Community* (Pelican 1968), pp. 141-142; Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Pelican, 1957/1962), pp. 28-30; Ferdynand Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (Heinemann, 1961), p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> For a critique of their position, see Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, c. 1945-2000* (MUP, 2012), pp. 195-196.

the *labour* of family life for working-class mothers, who were too busy cooking, cleaning, making and mending for play.<sup>58</sup> Of course, alongside depictions of hardworking men and intimate, playful fathers, there remains numerous examples of distant and neglectful fathers in the post period too.<sup>59</sup> The post-war decades witnessed a mixed picture of fatherly engagement with their children, influenced more by structural conditions and interpersonal spousal and generational dynamics than by an underlying modernizing trend. Even when men did take a more active role in childrearing, the stubborn hegemony of male breadwinning ensured that such incursions were severely timebound.

Much less historical work has been done on fatherhood since the early 1970s. In a 2018 article about the period 1950-1990, King and Angela Davis offered a partial qualification to King's earlier claims, arguing that while 'ideals of fatherhood and the role of men the home dramatically shifted in the post-war period... the division of labour and responsibility for children in practice changed little'.<sup>60</sup> Their findings accorded with a number of sociological studies, which reported that even by the 1980s, fathers' remained largely excluded from parenting practices, particularly with babies and infants.<sup>61</sup> However, in a fascinating intergenerational study, Julia Brannen traces a loose chronology of men becoming increasingly likely to be involved in childcare, but for a more recent period, and with notable points of continuity as well as change. Brannen and her colleagues interviewed native British and immigrant Irish and Polish men born across three generations: those born between 1911 and 1931 (becoming fathers in the inter-war period); between 1937 and 1953 (becoming fathers in the 1960s); and between 1962 and 1980 (becoming fathers in the 1990s).<sup>62</sup> They developed three typologies: the 'work-focused father', which crossed categories of class and generation;

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<sup>58</sup> Davidoff, *Family Story*, p. 107; King, *Family Men*, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Alan Johnson, *This Boy* (Corgi, 2013); Frank Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Postwar Britain' in *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999); Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (London: Allen Lane, 1974); Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London: Virago, 1990/1997).

<sup>60</sup> Angela Davis and Laura King, 'Gendered Perspectives on Men's Changing Familial Roles in Postwar England, c.1950-1990' in *Gender & History*, 30 (2018).

<sup>61</sup> For example, Brian Jackson, *Fatherhood* (Allen & Unwin, 1984); Charles Lewis, *Becoming a Father* (Open University, 1986).

<sup>62</sup> Julia Brannen and Ann Nilsen, 'From Fatherhood to Fathering: Transmission and Change among British Fathers in Four-generation Families' in *Sociology*, 40 (2006), p. 338. (The fourth generation refers to the sons of the youngest cohort).

the 'family men', who were more common in the two older generations – committed to their work, but 'present' at home; and the 'hands-on fathers', who were products of the younger generation, many of whom had become so having been made unemployed.<sup>63</sup> The authors concluded that 'today's fathers are more involved with their children than earlier generations... [however] childcare was still very much the work of mothers and 'hands on' fathers were exceptions rather than the rule'.<sup>64</sup> Their findings suggest that if there is a teleology of increasingly child-focused fathers, the periodisation is later, and the spectre of work continues to loom large.

Within and between their typologies, Brannen and her colleagues highlight the inconsistency and multiplicity of patterns of intergenerational transmission.<sup>65</sup> In doing so, they demonstrate how the perspectives of multiple generations help uncover some of the complex emotional responses to contemporaneous cultural norms of masculine identity. Looking collectively at some of the work on twentieth century masculinity, intergenerational dynamics and childhood, similar complexities emerge. Inter-war social researchers investigated evidence of 'self-confidence', 'character', 'independence', 'status' and 'citizenship' among unemployed men;<sup>66</sup> from a different research study, adult-children's memories of their unemployed fathers prompted a range of feelings, including renewed love and respect, shame and anger.<sup>67</sup> In post-war Canada, Robert Rutherford labelled fathers as either 'tyrants', 'teachers' or 'workaholics'; he also quoted children who recalled a range of emotional responses that were too diffuse to categorise.<sup>68</sup> The inter-war fathercraft movement encouraged every father to think of his child as an individual, with 'tastes, aptitudes, choices, determinations, destinies of his very own'.<sup>69</sup> As Hestor Barron and Claire Langhamer have shown in their work on 1930s school essays, such individuality flourished in children's imaginations, rather

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>64</sup> Fatherhood across Generations in Polish, Irish and White British Families, 1920-2010, Julia Brannen, Ann Mooney and Valerie Wigfall, (2013) *UK Data Service* [Accessed August 2018]

<sup>65</sup> Brannen and Nilsen, *From Fatherhood to Fathering*, p. 338 (The fourth generation refers to the sons of the youngest cohort).

<sup>66</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 161.

<sup>67</sup> See Strange, *Fatherhood*, pp. 52-59.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Rutherford (2011) 'Three Faces of Fatherhood as a Masculine Category: Tyrants, Teachers and Workaholics as 'Responsible Family Men' During Canada's Baby Boom' in Arnold and Brady (eds) *What is Masculinity?*

<sup>69</sup> Fisher, *Fathercraft*, pp. 453-454.

than in 'adult-defined norms, styles and communities'.<sup>70</sup> Strange's autobiographers did not identify their fathers according to particular masculine codes; rather, they presented 'multiple, situational fathers', who were variously 'free, jovial, cultured, alert, quick, cool and reliable in judgment, diligent, skilled, intelligent'.<sup>71</sup> In her work on mid-twentieth century all-male Anglican groups and societies, Lucy Delap suggests that 'we might usefully foreground [a] co-presence of enduring components of masculinities – of commitment to family and home, of action and adventure, of risk-taking and competitiveness, of breadwinning and maturity and assess its 'useability' for subgroups of men'.<sup>72</sup> This dissertation illustrates how such co-presences were mediated in interpersonal, intergenerational relationships after 1945. I argue that a conspicuous characteristic of post-war fatherhood was a softening of the more clearly delineated fatherly roles of earlier periods. As we shall see, there was less emphasis on rigidity, whether in the form of moral guidance, emotional attentiveness, or tyrannical control. Sons, meanwhile, responded in increasingly individual and idiosyncratic ways.

In producing an oral history of how these more open-ended intergenerational aspirations unfolded in the post-war period, this dissertation responds to the calls of Roper and Tosh – originally set out in *Manful Assertions*, and subsequently restated – for greater engagement with masculine subjectivities.<sup>73</sup> Writing in 2005, Roper's challenge to Scott's influential 1985 model for 'gender as a category of analysis' was that although 'subjective experience' was included alongside 'culturally available symbols', 'normative concepts' and 'social institutions', in effect, its place was subordinated to the other three elements.<sup>74</sup> In the same year, he lamented that where 'pre-gender conceptualisations of masculinity' lacked a proper degree of social and cultural context, subsequent approaches have risked subjectivity 'being reduced to a mere after-effect of the social relations of patriarchal power'.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in Ben Griffin's recent revision of Raewyn

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<sup>70</sup> Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, 'Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children's Writing' in *Social History*, (2016), p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>72</sup> Lucy Delap (2013) 'Be Strong and Play the Man': Anglican Masculinities in the Twentieth Century' in Delap and Sue Morgan (eds) *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 122.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Michael Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History' in *History Workshop Journal*, (2005); Tosh, *The History of Masculinity: an Outdated Concept?*

<sup>74</sup> Roper, *Slipping out of view*, p. 60; Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, pp. 1067-1069.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950' in *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 361-362.

Connell's theory of 'hegemonic masculinity', he argues that relations of power need not only be assessed discursively, and that men's 'situational identities' (how men move between different masculinities in different contexts, and what determines their agency to do so) demands more historical attention.<sup>76</sup> In his 2011 critique of the effect the *cultural turn* has had on the history of masculinity, Tosh lamented that 'questions of behaviour and agency have for too long been sidetracked by a historical practice dominated by meaning and representation'.<sup>77</sup> Instead, he argued, we should search for a 'culturally inflected social history', which keeps 'its moorings in social experience'.<sup>78</sup> In mid-twentieth century Britain, as James Hinton has argued, 'selfhood was not a given, but a quest', as people made and remade subjectivities in reflexive negotiations with social and political change, under the surveillance of the new social sciences of sociology, anthropology and psychology.<sup>79</sup> By locating oral history alongside post-war social science research, this dissertation traces a history of male subjectivities across a period during which conceptions of self and social relationships underwent particular scrutiny.

It is perhaps of historiographical significance that in the era of reflexive selfhood and the personal turn, some of the most notable attempts by historians to examine the intersection of subjectivity, social and familial experience and cultural scripts have been autobiographical. Carolyn Steedman's part-memoir, part filial homage, *Landscape For a Good Woman*, about female working-class experience in the 1950s begins 'This is about lives lived out on the borderlands, lives for which the central interpretive devices of the culture don't quite work'.<sup>80</sup> Ronald Fraser combined oral history interviews with his own experience of psychoanalytic therapy to tell a story of mid-twentieth century middle-class domestic life with servants.<sup>81</sup> Melanie Tebbutt's wide-ranging social history of inter-war boyhood, which successfully dismantled discursive constructions of male delinquency, was told through the prism of her father Les's childhood diaries of

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<sup>76</sup> Ben Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem' in *Gender & History*, 30 (2018), pp. 377-378; 392.

<sup>77</sup> Tosh, *The History of Masculinity: an Outdated Concept?*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>79</sup> Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (Rutgers, 1987), p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past: The Manor House Amnersfield 1933-1945* (Verso, 1984).

1930s Northampton.<sup>82</sup> Roper's recent work weaves together legacies of the First World War with memories of his grandfather, who fought in it. Advocating the utility of personal experience as historical source material, he argues that 'the history of war in the Roper family suggests the limit of some histories of trauma, aftermath and intergenerational transmission'.<sup>83</sup> Most pertinently with regard to the present study, Frank Mort's article *Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Post-war Britain* tells a 'recognisable story of time and place' as it documents experiences of class, age and the legacy of war, but also one which is 'strange and unfamiliar'.<sup>84</sup> Using the particularity of his own fractured relationship with his father as an empirical base, Mort argues that 'to choose to tell the story of the life only with social history as the guide is to threaten the symbolic traces of individuality. The narratives of the post-war years are so portentous and authoritative that they constantly threaten to engulf subjectivity'.<sup>85</sup>

Selina Todd's sleeve notes to *The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* betray similar motivations – she 'looked in vain for any aspect of my family's story when I went to university to read history... eventually, I realised I would have to write this history myself'.<sup>86</sup> However, she is in fact sceptical about the contribution the 'personal turn' has made for life narrative approaches to stories of historical change. She argues that 'by focusing solely on personal testimonies and on individual subjectivities, we risk suggesting that such sources – and that the private (or semi-private) expression of emotion – are more 'authentic' than the collective, or open, expression of aspiration through trade union records or memories of rent strikes'.<sup>87</sup> In Todd's cautionary analysis, she calls for reengagement with the 1960s social history of E.P. Thompson, which famously drew on the lives of ordinary families to illustrate the power and authenticity of collective experience.<sup>88</sup> Julie-Marie Strange argues that 'for some scholars, the study of family relationships and interpersonal, affective relations threatens to be inward looking and fragmented, and distracts from 'big' issues of class,

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<sup>82</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-War Years* (MUP, 2012),

<sup>83</sup> Michael Roper, 'The Bush, the Suburbs and the Long Great War: A Family Memoir' in *History Workshop Journal*, 86 (2018).

<sup>84</sup> Mort, *Social and Symbolic*, p. 355.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>86</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (John Murray, 2014), sleeve notes.

<sup>87</sup> Selina Todd, 'Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century' in *Social History*, 39 (2014), p. 496.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492; E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (V.Gollancz, 1963).

power and politics... [however] the family is where individuals learn about power and structural inequities.’<sup>89</sup> In this respect, she is in partial agreement with Todd, but her focus remains on the impact of structure and power relationships at the level of the family. This dissertation leans towards Strange’s approach. As I will argue in Chapter Two, subjective understandings of class identity were important to articulations of selfhood for these fathers and sons. However, where Todd has oriented family experiences towards wider processes of class-consciousness, I show how class-consciousness informs the interpersonal dynamics in fathers and sons’ relationships with each other.

By examining the intersubjectivity of father-son relationships, this thesis argues that post-war men and boys experienced a broad range of practices and feelings. Nonetheless, such experiences were framed by psychic and cultural impressions of fathers as secondary parents to mothers. Accordingly, while filial succession in family business, trade or industry was less common after the Second World War, male-breadwinning remained the prevailing mode of adult masculinity to which boys aspired.

## **2. The Post-war Family, Gender Relations and Discourses of Class**

In her 1999 history of middle-class families across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Leonore Davidoff argues that ‘human life could not function without families... [but] the family has been removed into a separate domain and often regarded as a natural phenomenon without need of study or explanation’.<sup>90</sup> Since then, families have become a key prism through which to view patterns of historical change and continuity in the twentieth century. Alongside the literature on fatherhood already mentioned, historians have examined intimate relationships between spouses, and, to a lesser extent, between generations and siblings.<sup>91</sup> The family in post-war Britain was a

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<sup>89</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 214.

<sup>90</sup> Davidoff, *Family Story*, p. 52.

<sup>91</sup> For example, Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day* (OUP, 2014); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Atlantic, 2003); Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (OUP, 2011); Davis, *Modern Motherhood*; Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918-1960* (OUP, 2006); Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (OUP, 2013); Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (CUP, 2010).

particularly freighted social entity, emerging prominently in government policy, expert discourse, representations in culture, as well as in the subjective experiences of the citizenry.<sup>92</sup> In policy, the creation of the Welfare State in 1945 had provided families with family allowances (paid to mothers) for every child after the first, and the security of free healthcare and comprehensive national insurance.<sup>93</sup> The 1944 Education Act had also enshrined free secondary education for every child up to the age of 15.<sup>94</sup> In the labour market, full employment and rising wages added to families' levels of confidence and security, which, for many parents, marked a significant change from their childhood experiences in the 1920s, 30s and early 40s.<sup>95</sup> In housing, there was a resumption of the inter-war migration of people from inner cities to new towns and suburban areas, which, together with rising affluence and new household technologies, saw the home emerge as a key site of family leisure.<sup>96</sup> Nowhere were the social changes of these structural effects more comprehensively documented than in the abundance of social studies that emerged over the period. As increasing numbers of people moved out of poverty, social-science shifted its focus to observe 'ordinary' people, bringing the material conditions and social relationships of families *en masse* into focus for the first time.<sup>97</sup> The social studies produced during this period provide an invaluable resource for historians of the family in twentieth century Britain. I draw on them critically to locate the emotional lives of fathers and sons against the broader social trends the surveys identified.

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<sup>92</sup> Michael Peplar deals with the emergence of the family in these contexts in Michael Peplar, *Family Matters: A History of Ideas About Family Since 1945* (Longman, 2002), Chapters Two-Five.

<sup>93</sup> Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy Since the Industrial Revolution* (Macmillan, 1984), pp. 270-286.

<sup>94</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Educating the Nation I: Schools' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (2014), p. 8; Education Act 1944 (The National Archives, 1944), II/3, II/8 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/7-8/31/contents/enacted> [Accessed October 2018]

<sup>95</sup> Ian Gazeley 'Manual Work and Pay, 1900-1970', p. 70.

<sup>96</sup> Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, p. 269; see also Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (2005); Peter Mandler 'New Towns for Old' in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds) *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* (Rivers Oram, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain' in *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), p. 288; Jon Lawrence, 'Social-Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference in Early 1960s England' in *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), p. 215; see also Chris Harris (1994) 'The Family in Post-war Britain' in Jim Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds) *Understanding post-war British society* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 48-49.



There is some consensus that in the years following 1945 a happy family and home life were what Claire Langhamer has described as ‘*the blueprint for post-war construction in Britain*’.<sup>98</sup> Certainly, this aspiration was born out demographically. After a wartime dip, the rate of single people marrying remained high from the late 1940s, peaking in 1972.<sup>99</sup> The median age of marriage gradually fell between 1951 and 1971 from 26.8 years for men and 24.6 years for women to 24.6 years for men and 22.6 years for women.<sup>100</sup> Fertility remained stable in the 1950s, rising to a peak of 94 births per 1,000 women in 1964 (the so-called ‘baby-boom’), upon which the age at which couples had their first child continued to fall to its lowest point of 29.4 for men and 26.4 for women in 1974.<sup>101</sup> After a surge in the divorce rate in the mid-1940s (a consequence of prolonged wartime separation), it had halved by 1960, only returning to late 1940s levels in 1968, then accelerating thereafter following the Divorce Reform Act of 1969.<sup>102</sup> As Pat Thane has argued, the latent eugenicist thinking that informed concerns about increasing the birthrate and limiting both immigration and emigration were tempered by the growing autonomy of families, who typically had just two or three children.<sup>103</sup> In short, most people were marrying, marrying young, and having children early. Moreover, buoyed by feelings of confidence and security, couples – particularly women in couples – shifted their focus from mere survival to opportunities for families and children to explore possibilities for self-fulfilment.<sup>104</sup>

From the 1960s, demographic studies began to show that the ‘nuclear family’ had been commonplace since the beginning of industrialisation; however, the cultivation of small family sizes for the purposes of individual self-realisation was a more modern phenomenon.<sup>105</sup> As Chris Harris has argued, Anthony Giddens’ idea of the

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<sup>98</sup> Langhamer, *Meanings of Home*, p. 353; see also, for example, Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>99</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Marriages in England and Wales: 2015*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/bulletins/marriagesinenglandandwalesprovisional/2015> [Accessed November 2018]

<sup>100</sup> Jane Elliott ‘Demographic Trends in Domestic Life’ in David Clark (ed) *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacquelin Burgoyne (1944-1988)* (Routledge 1991).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96; Births by Parents’ Characteristics in England and Wales.

<sup>102</sup> Elliott, *Demographic Trends*, p. 91.

<sup>103</sup> Pat Thane ‘Population Politics in Post-War British Culture’ in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds) *Moments of Modernity*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115; 127-132.

<sup>105</sup> From the 1960s, the influential Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure disproved mid-century functionalist ideas that the nuclear family emerged in the twentieth-century to

late-modern citizenry as individualised social agents who decide on the shape of their relationships according to the emotional benefits they yield, was happening at the level of the married couple.<sup>106</sup> At the end of the 1960s, the so-called ‘permissive legislation’ on homosexuality, divorce, contraception and abortion was designed to fortify, not undermine the family; unhappy marriages, unwanted children and back-street abortions were neither befitting of personal nor familial happiness.<sup>107</sup> By the early seventies, however, the idealised nuclear family image was becoming harder to sustain, threatened by alternative counter-cultural lifestyles, reinvigorated psychoanalytic therapeutic discourses, and the emergence of female consciousness-raising and the women’s movement.<sup>108</sup> Together with permissive legislation, these cultural influences affected the average age of marriage and of having children, and the divorce rate, all of which increased markedly thereafter.<sup>109</sup> As well as representing a generation in demographic terms, then, my periodisation straddles the rise and fall of the post-war nuclear family unit as a lived aspiration.<sup>110</sup>

Underpinning the modern nuclear family ideal – and to some extent contributing to its decline from the early 1970s – was an understanding about the gender roles spouses were expected to perform. The notion of a ‘companionate marriage’ was several centuries old. But in the minds of the mid-twentieth century marriage reformers its meaning shifted from the idea of husbandly authority and wifely devotion to one of mutual sexual attraction, respect and affection.<sup>111</sup> The realisation of companionate marriage in the twentieth century rested on a delicate rebalancing of spousal power relations, reappraisal of the division of household labour, and a reciprocal understanding of each party’s needs. But more equitable relations did not equate to parity in all areas of life. Companionate marriages needed to be compatible with a

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meet the requirements of the modern, marketised economy. See Harris, *The Family in Post-war Britain*, p. 52; Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>106</sup> Harris, *The Family in Post-war Britain*, p. 55; See also Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>107</sup> Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 34-38.

<sup>108</sup> Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp. 214-223; Matthew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (OUP, 2006), pp. 271; 279-287.

<sup>109</sup> Elliott, *Demographic Trends*, pp. 72-76, 82-82.

<sup>110</sup> As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the average age of a first-time father in 1974 was 29, which provides a demographic punctuation mark for my periodisation. Births by Parents’ Characteristics in England and Wales.

<sup>111</sup> Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 93; Davidoff, *Family Story*, p. 37; Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 47-50. On the Victorian example being more compatible with husbandly authority, see Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p. 28.

society that remained moored to the convention of male breadwinning and female domestic labour, which, of course, included childcare. Psychologists' reports of men's responses to the idea of greater companionship ranged from discomfort and confusion to stubborn assertions of male authority and disinterest in their wives' needs.<sup>112</sup> Often the result was mutual dissatisfaction as men and women alike struggled to come to terms with the advice given to them in the new 'post-patriarchal' era.<sup>113</sup> Mid-century American sociologist Talcott Parsons thought that conjugal gender equality might be attained by mutual recognition of men's 'instrumental' and women's 'expressive' roles; although he conceded that the female dependency such a division implied was problematic.<sup>114</sup> King draws on Margaret and Patrice Higonnet's theory of a 'double-helix' to explain how post-war British advanced towards more 'family-oriented' behaviour while retaining their masculine identity, just as women had advanced into the normally male-dominated sphere of the workplace in wartime, only to retreat once men had returned.<sup>115</sup> However, deterministic theories such as these underplay the conscious decisions of both husbands and wives to develop particular strategies to deal with normative expectations of the post-war familial gender order. As we shall see, such strategies revealed patterns of harmony as well as resistance.

A prominent strain of the post-war 'professional hegemony', in which experts scrutinised post-war British family life, was psychoanalytically-informed advice about child-rearing.<sup>116</sup> As Chapter Three suggests, such advice had profound implications for the social organisation of families because it emphatically located the mother in the home, with the father commonly situated in a position of benign, but peripheral support. As John Bowlby, the architect of the influential 'attachment theory' that underpinned much of the post-war expert discourse, advocated:

'Not only do [husbands] provide for their wives to enable them to devote themselves unrestrictedly to the care of the infant and toddler, but, by providing love and

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<sup>112</sup> Marcus Collins, *Modern love*, pp. 118-122.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>115</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>116</sup> On 'professional hegemony', see Conekin, Mort and Waters 'Introduction' in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds) *Moments of Modernity*, pp. 11; 14-15.

companionship, they support the mother emotionally and help her maintain that harmonious contented mood in the atmosphere of which her infant thrives.’<sup>117</sup>

The popularisation of such views contributed to 1970s feminist narratives, which highlighted the unequal power dynamics of modern marriages, whatever the aspirations to companionate models.<sup>118</sup> Post-war labour-saving household technologies paradoxically led to more time, on average, being spent by women on housework, as standards of cleanliness and presentation rose.<sup>119</sup> However, as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has argued, until the post-war period housewifery was an aspiration for many working-class women who coveted the financial stability brought about by the male breadwinner model, and remained one for many women – particularly women of ethnic minority backgrounds – after the war.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, middle-class feminists’ characterisations of domestic drudgery, isolation and exploitation misjudged the pride and self-respect housewives took from shaping the family’s social status and aspiration, as well as running the family budget.<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, increasing numbers of women did enter the workforce over this period; mainly – though not inclusively – pre-childbirth and after their children had reached school age.<sup>122</sup> Dolly Smith Wilson has argued that these incursions were tempered by popular criticism of working mothers, the ‘dual burden’ of employment and domestic roles, and the devaluing of women’s jobs, many of which were part-time and low paid.<sup>123</sup> But as Helen McCarthy has suggested, though most working mothers remained economically dependent on their husbands, their growing autonomy was beginning to challenge the ongoing viability of the traditional gender order of family life.<sup>124</sup>

Just as the ‘separate spheres’ model of male breadwinning and female homemaking in the nineteenth century had middle-class origins, there was also a

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<sup>117</sup> John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Pelican 1953/1965), p. 13.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife* (Routledge, 1970); Oakley, *Housewife*.

<sup>119</sup> Pat Thane ‘Family Life and “Normality” in Post-war British Culture’ in Bessel and Schumann (eds) *Life After Death*, p. 203; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska ‘Housewifery’ in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed) *Changing the Subject: Women’s History and Historiography 1900-2000* (Longman 2001), p. 160.

<sup>120</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Housewifery*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162; See also Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Blackwell, 1995), p. 40.

<sup>122</sup> McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>123</sup> Wilson, *The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*, p. 206.

<sup>124</sup> McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*, p. 48.

classed dimension to discourses of companionate marriage in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Social researchers reporting on communities in which traditional industries still dominated, or in urban areas before migration to new towns, were inclined to document men's distance from family life and preoccupation with homosocial work and leisure.<sup>125</sup> Studies of new towns and suburbs, however, tended to emphasise greater conjugal partnership.<sup>126</sup> Ferdynand Zweig delighted in the 'transformation of values... new ways of thinking and feeling, a new ethos, new aspirations and cravings' of 'affluent workers', who in the late 1950s had been much more inclined to spend time with their families than the men he had researched 10 years earlier.<sup>127</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott famously reported that more introspective nuclear families emerged in new town estates at the expense of working-class communities and strong kinship networks.<sup>128</sup> John Goldthorpe and his colleagues agreed that displacement from longstanding communities caused newly affluent families to lead more 'privatised' lives, with men more likely to spend leisure time with families than work colleagues; but he also thought such tendencies to be commensurate with working-class identity rather than evidence of middle-class aspiration.<sup>129</sup> In her 1957 anthropological study of 20 London families, Elizabeth Bott concluded that, while there was a great deal of individual differences between families, it was how close-knit couples' social networks were – not their class identity – that determined how likely they were to share tasks, leisure time and recreation;<sup>130</sup> couples with loose-knit networks were more likely to spend time with each other.<sup>131</sup> Post-war affluence, changes to material conditions, housing and proximity to kinship networks were clearly impacting on family life, even if the nature and extent of those changes was contested.

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<sup>125</sup> Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is our life* (Tavistock, 1969); John Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (OUP, 1956), p. 58. Mogey identifies a gendered division of household labour both in Oxford's urban St Ebbe's district and the new town in Barton, however, there was much less separation of roles in Barton.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. ix.

<sup>128</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 11. Young and Willmott observed families moving from Bethnal Green to 'Greenleigh' (Debden in suburban Essex)

<sup>129</sup> John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (CUP, 1969), p. 97; Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (CUP, 1968), p. 159.

<sup>130</sup> Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms, and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families* (Free Press, 1957), especially pp. 3-4.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.; See also Lawrence, *Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain*, p. 282.

Recent revisionist historiography reveals that such contestations remain. In his secondary analysis of Goldthorpe's fieldnotes, Jon Lawrence argues that the investigators may have underestimated patterns of aspiration to middle-class values.<sup>132</sup> Young and Willmott have been criticised for overplaying the strength of kinship networks in Bethnal Green.<sup>133</sup> Angela Davis has suggested that theirs and other studies were also guilty of exaggerating the companionability of marriages in new estates because they were caught up in a mood of post-war optimism about more equitable working-class conjugal arrangements.<sup>134</sup> Nicky Hart argues that the studies overlooked the role of women in the formation of working-class identity.<sup>135</sup> Selina Todd has reminded us that, in any case, for many families, post-war 'affluence' was a patchy experience, with, for example, continuing demands made on housewives to adopt longstanding strategies for managing tight household budgets.<sup>136</sup> In short, while it is difficult to generalise about the nature of companionate marriages in the post-war decades, or the extent to which they can be mapped to changes in material circumstances or conceptions of class identity, for many families, there is considerable evidence to suggest that conjugal roles remained little changed.

Measures of companionate husbands routinely included their likelihood of being attentive fathers. Such men were displaying a general instinct to spend time with their families, rather than on their own or with friends, and were presumed to be engaging in a more equitable division of domestic labour. Viewed collectively, like the social studies and their revisionist critiques, historians of masculinity and fatherhood are ambivalent about the relationship between companionability, kinship networks and class identity. Pat Ayres has shown how working-class men in Liverpool whose homes had been displaced by new-town movement, but whose work remained in the city, generally chose to stay out late after work socialising with male friends rather than returning home. For those both living and working in the new towns, however, leisure time was

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<sup>132</sup> Lawrence, *Social-Science Encounters*, p. 216.

<sup>133</sup> Freddie Foks, British Sociology in the 1950s: From Kinship Studies to Community Studies, *Modern Cultural History Seminar* 2017), University of Cambridge.

<sup>134</sup> Angela Davis, 'A Critical Perspective on British Social Surveys and Community Studies and their Accounts of Married Life, 1945–70' in *Cultural and Social History*, 6 (2009), pp. 48–49.

<sup>135</sup> Nicola Hart, 'Gender and the Rise and Fall of Class Politics' in *New Left Review*, I (1989), p. 21

<sup>136</sup> Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class' in *Contemporary British History*, 22 (2008), p. 501.

more likely to be focused on their families.<sup>137</sup> There were even instances in which women's work in new towns required men to look after children, albeit, for the most part, for short periods.<sup>138</sup> Lynn Abrams has argued that, contrary to middle-class stereotypes, Scottish working-class men were loving fathers, whose poverty demanded that they devoted more time to their children because, unable to afford dolls-houses and train-sets, they would use their Sundays to hand-make toys, such as hoops and cleeks (hooks).<sup>139</sup> On the other hand, Stephen Brooke argues that working-class gender identities became destabilised over the course of the 1950s; but, rather than participating in companionate marriages, men followed two 'dominant modes of expression': nostalgia for the traditional working-class home-based mother; and a celebration of 'aggressive masculinity', as depicted in popular fiction, plays and films.<sup>140</sup>

Both Abrams and Brooke articulate working-class and middle-class cultures as mutually distinct. King's depiction of 'family-oriented masculinity', however, is a broad church. She argues that the decline of domestic servants in middle-class households and the reduced access to kinship networks for working-class mothers each had positive implications for joint parenting practices.<sup>141</sup> By the end of the 1950s, King suggests, 'both attitudes and experiences [of family life and parenting] were becoming closer across class groups', and that 'men's increased involvement and investment in their relationships with their children [had] become common amongst large swathes of British society'.<sup>142</sup> Viewed alongside the research of Abrams, Ayres and Brooke, King's observations contribute to the mixed picture of post-war gender relations in families. King is right to highlight experiences that cut across class divides, but we should treat the idea of a cross-class march towards attentive and invested fatherhood with caution. Father-son relationships across society were more ambiguous. There was a range of experiences in working-class and socially mobile families, negotiated with cognisance

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<sup>137</sup> Ayres, *Masculinities in Post-War Liverpool*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Abrams, *Daddy*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>140</sup> Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s' in *Journal of Social History*, 34 (2001), p. 775. Brooke refers to writers often collectively referred to as 'angry young men', who frequently used their lead characters to represent the young working or lower-middle-class male, frustrated with modern society. For example, Jimmy in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Arthur Seaton in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1958) and Vic Brown in Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* (1960).

<sup>141</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 78.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 198, 122.

of, but not determined by changing material and cultural conditions. Middle-class experiences were similarly equivocal, though they were more marked by patterns of material and cultural continuity.

Underpinning the contradictory and contested accounts of men's roles in families in the post-war period, is some degree of consensus: in so far as men were companionate husbands and attentive fathers, the manifestation of such qualities was partial, occasional, or both, compared with the leading roles women had in families. Finch and Summerfield's wry appraisal of the social studies was that 'In advanced middle-class Woodford husbands would go so far as to make a commitment to wash the dishes every night and do the Hoovering on Saturday mornings. Meanwhile, in the Yorkshire mining town of Ashton, they were still throwing their dinners on the back of the fire if the wife had failed to serve the right menu'.<sup>143</sup> Goldthorpe observed a majority of affluent workers to be involved with 'putting their children to bed', 'reading to children and telling stories', and 'taking out younger children and babies', but these were 'main responsibilities' for just 10 per cent, 22 per cent, and seven per cent of the sample respectively.<sup>144</sup> In their cohort study of 700 Nottingham families, Elizabeth and John Newson wrote approvingly that half the fathers they observed were 'highly participant' (leaving half, of course, who were not), but confirmed that such participation was contingent upon the time left over after their working day: 'the final responsibility for bringing up a small child rests... with the mother'.<sup>145</sup> Even King concedes that family-oriented men were only 'helpers' to their wives, in accordance with their depictions among even the more optimistic of the social researchers.<sup>146</sup> Men were 'helping' with a range of domestic chores and engaging in aspects of childcare, but such help and engagement was severely time-limited and they rarely bore overall responsibility. As we shall see, there were post-war men, across classes, who were highly invested in their children and behaved with great tenderness within these constraints; there were also many that took little or no interest at all in their wives' responsibilities, including childcare.

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<sup>143</sup> Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59' in Clark (ed) *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change*, p. 18.

<sup>144</sup> Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>145</sup> Newson and Newson, *Four Years Old in an Urban Community*, pp. 546, 548.

<sup>146</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 77-86.



Arguably a more significant trend, which has been largely overlooked, is the amount of time men were distracted by non-familial activities when they *were at home*. The majority of the social research and subsequent analysis agrees that 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) and routine household maintenance were the sole responsibility of men, and for many, those activities occupied most of their time away from work.<sup>147</sup> They were also particularly prominent activities in the post-war period, as increasing numbers of families either owned their own homes or were in long-term council renting arrangements.<sup>148</sup> Such patterns were routinely presented as evidence of men's orientation towards privatised living and home-based leisure and away from homosocial leisure pursuits of works clubs and pubs.<sup>149</sup> But while they at some level represented concern for their families' quality of life, they were not, in general, undertaken with families.<sup>150</sup> In other words, not only was it common for men to augment their working week with overtime in the decades following the Second World War, the time they did spend at home was often spent engaged with tasks undertaken alone. As we shall see in Chapter Five, although DIY carried considerable material, symbolic and gendered significance for fathers and sons, it was rarely a site of direct intergenerational transmission of skills, knowledge or behaviours.

The post-war growth in popularity of home-based leisure activities such as DIY and gardening has been closely linked to patterns of 'privatism' (time at home with families rather than socialising in communities) and 'instrumentalism' (working to earn money to improve one's material conditions) borne of rising affluence.<sup>151</sup> But as Goldthorpe, whose 1960s *Affluent Worker* studies gave most clarity to these ideas, argues, such patterns represented adaptations rather than overhauls of working-class

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<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Davis, *Critical Perspective* p. 58; Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, p. 102; Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 25-27; Zweig, *The Worker*, pp. 96-100.

<sup>148</sup> *Home Ownership in the UK, 2017*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/data/housing/> [Accessed August 2018]. By 1970, 60 per cent fell into this category (16.2% own outright; 19.5% mortgage; 24.3% council). The remainder were in various sharing arrangements or living with parents.

<sup>149</sup> See, for example, Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>150</sup> Paul Thompson 'Imagination and Passivity in Leisure: Coventry Car Workers and the Families from the 1920s to the 1990s' in David Thoms, Len Holden and Tim Claydon (eds) *The Motor Car and Popular Culture in the 20th Century* (Ashgate, 1998), p. 263.

<sup>151</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, p. 175.

life.<sup>152</sup> Jon Lawrence agrees, making the point that instrumentalism and privatism had long been characteristics of working-class cultures but flourished in more affluent conditions, which afforded working-class families greater control over their lives.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, examining patterns of mid-century continuity in the northeast town of Beverley, Stefan Ramsden has shown how post-war families had often led privatised lives in the more financially straitened inter-war period.<sup>154</sup> Equally, as they had in previous generations, post-war residents continued to socialise in the community (men even enlisted the help of friends and neighbours to help with DIY projects).<sup>155</sup> For Selina Todd, these patterns of intergenerational continuity over the mid-century period represented classed solidarities over time.<sup>156</sup> Todd, like Ben Jones, emphasises the endurance of well-defined, politicised understandings of class identity.<sup>157</sup> For Lawrence, however, 'in everyday usage, class was a mutable concept – its boundaries were fuzzy, and its purpose was more to make sense of inequalities in power relations than to assert powerful claims about self-identity'.<sup>158</sup> Lawrence, along with Claire Langhamer, Mike Savage and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, have explored the utility of concepts of ordinariness and individuality to assess forms of subjective class identity across the second half of the twentieth century – concepts to which we shall return in Chapter Two.<sup>159</sup> This dissertation examines how class was mobilised in father-son relationships as a marker of intergenerational change and continuity within families. I argue that post-war social change influenced fathers and sons' conceptions of selfhood, society and their relationships with each other in these shifting contexts. However, despite often having had quite contrasting experiences of work and education – particularly working-

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<sup>152</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, p. 103.

<sup>153</sup> Lawrence, *Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain*, p. 289.

<sup>154</sup> Stefan Ramsden, 'Remaking Working-Class Community: Sociability, Belonging and 'Affluence' in a Small Town, 1930-1980' in *Contemporary British History*, 29 (2015), pp. 7-8.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 14-15.

<sup>156</sup> Todd, *Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century*, p. 504.

<sup>157</sup> Ben Jones, 'The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-war England' in *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010); Todd, *Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century*; Todd, *The People*.

<sup>158</sup> Lawrence, *Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain*, p. 275.

<sup>159</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'Who the Hell are Ordinary People?' (2017), *Transactions from the Royal Historical Society*; Lawrence, *Social-Science Encounters*; Jon Lawrence, 'Workers' Testimony and the Sociological Reification of Manual / Non-manual Distinctions in 1960s Britain' in *Sozial Geschichte Online*, 20 (2017); Mike Savage, 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study' in *Sociology*, 39 (2005); Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method* (OUP, 2010); Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Discourses of 'class' in Britain in 'New Times'' in *Contemporary British History*, 31 (2017); Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000* (OUP, 2018),

class and socially mobile families – their filial relationships remained underscored by continuities in the practices and mentalities of male breadwinning.

### 3. Generations and Parenting

Post-war social mobility is often assessed by comparing the relative job statuses of fathers and sons.<sup>160</sup> However, patterns of generational change and continuity were also experienced through vertical and horizontal social relationships, within, and outside families, among women and girls as well as men and boys, and in response to contemporary cultural conditions.<sup>161</sup> Age and generation interacted with work and class identities in the production of these fathers and sons' masculine selfhoods and social relationships. June Edmunds and Bryan Turner identify post-war Britain as a particularly receptive historical moment for generational identity. The post-war generation, they argue, was 'constitutive of the rise of modern consumerism, where generational audiences appear to be as important as social class or ethnic divisions or even more so'.<sup>162</sup> Bill Osgerby identifies the 'teenager', along with the 'housewife' and the 'bourgeois worker', as one of the three archetypes that most epitomise post-war society.<sup>163</sup> Post-war youth, which was indelibly associated the mass marketisation of popular music and fashion (particularly after the arrival of rock and roll in 1956), was a heavily scrutinised social category.<sup>164</sup> Concern surrounding juvenile delinquency and teenage rebellion – most often focused on young males – prompted a range of responses, from moral panics in the popular press to the establishment of multi-sex youth clubs, and approaches to rehabilitation that were recast to focus on individual needs.<sup>165</sup> As King has argued, in these contexts, focus often fell on fathers to step up as

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<sup>160</sup> Anthony Heath and Clive Payne (2000) 'Social Mobility' in A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds) *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (MacMillan, 2000), p. 255.

<sup>161</sup> Paul Thompson 'Family Myth, Models, and Denials' in Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (eds) *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths, and Memories* (OUP, 1993), pp. 15-16.

<sup>162</sup> June Edmunds and Bryan Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society* (Open University, 2002), p. 4; see also Jonathan White, 'Thinking Generations' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 64 (2013), pp. 222-223.

<sup>163</sup> Bill Osgerby (1993) 'From the Roaring Twenties to the Swinging Sixties: Continuity and Change in British Youth Culture, 1929-1959' in Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (eds) *What Difference did the War Make?* (Leicester, 1993), p. 91.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>165</sup> On moral panics and press representation see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Routledge, 1972/2002), especially pp. ix-xxii. On the establishment of youth clubs, see Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 59. On rehabilitation centres, see Abigail Wills, 'Delinquency, Masculinity and Citizenship in England 1950-1970' in *Past & Present*, 187 (2005), especially pp. 159-160.

moral examples to their sons.<sup>166</sup> By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the 'generation gap' was embedded in popular consciousness as a vernacular explanation of intergenerational conflict and misunderstanding.<sup>167</sup> As Deborah Cohen and Matthew Thomson have each argued, as a generation of children came of age who had known little of the privations of war and more about individual freedom of choice, it became increasingly legitimate to question their parents' conservatism and the repressive nuclear family structures from which they had emerged.<sup>168</sup>

Writing in 2012, Selina Todd and Hilary Young chose the *Daily Mirror's* 1957 proclamation of a 'war on parents' to emblemise the cultural saliency of intergenerational conflict. 'The youngsters have big battalions', the article said, 'their battle song is a tune on a washboard... [referencing the skiffle music craze] they draw their rations in coffee bars'.<sup>169</sup> But Todd and Young argued that the real rupture was not between generations, but between representation and experience. Their argument was threefold: first, that parents in fact supported their offspring – financially, in their liberal approaches to regulating their behaviour, and by encouraging them to explore new cultural opportunities; second, that contrary to the claims of subcultural theorists, categories of age and generation 'interacted with (rather than supplanted) class identities and relationships'; and finally, that to the extent that 'privatism' existed, it did so in tandem with sociability (parents might choose to stay at home to fund teenagers public lives, or teenagers might stay in with them).<sup>170</sup> As we have seen, for Todd, such patterns of optimistic intergenerational solidarity were symptoms of families' shared historic experiences of class struggle.<sup>171</sup> As late 1950s and early 1960s teenagers became late 1960s and early 1970s adults, the liberal values their parents had fostered were realised in trade union activism and women's movement consciousness-raising.<sup>172</sup> Todd's narrative provides a neat counter to the more familiar refrain of 1960s generational rebellion and the emerging breakdown, of the nuclear family ideal.

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<sup>166</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 64-68.

<sup>167</sup> Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp. 224.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., Chapter Seven; Matthew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (OUP, 2013), p. 229.

<sup>169</sup> Selina Todd and Hilary Young, 'Baby-boomers to 'Beanstalkers': Making the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain' in *Cultural and Social History*, 9 (2012), p. 451.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>171</sup> Todd, *Class, Experience and Britain's Twentieth Century*, p. 504.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.; Todd and Young, *Baby-boomers*, pp. 461-463.

In practice, however, post-war intergenerational relations had myriad outcomes, informed by cultural rupture, familial continuity and a range of other dynamics. For example, parents of post-war teenagers would likely have been conscious of, and perhaps participated in, youth cultures of their own.<sup>173</sup> Depending on their particular local and regional industrial conditions, many, across classes, may have experienced relatively affluent inter-war adolescences.<sup>174</sup> For their children, meanwhile, experiences of youth culture, subcultures and countercultural movements were far from homogenous, following particular classed, gendered and raced organisations of social life.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, parents and children negotiated post-war youth culture idiosyncratically. Gillian Mitchell has shown how rock'n'roll and pop music artists had cross-generational appeal from the late 1950s to the early 1970s.<sup>176</sup> Pat Ayres has described the generational underpinnings of post-war young male competitiveness, acquisitiveness and Beatle-mania in 1960s Liverpool.<sup>177</sup> At the same time, in the same city, Paul McCartney was soliciting his father's advice about the merits of his latest pop compositions.<sup>178</sup> As Dominic Sandbrook has argued, there were also a great many families upon whom 1950s and 1960s popular music, fashion and youth culture made little or no impression at all.<sup>179</sup> Claire Langhamer has concluded that in so far as post-war young people *were* engaged in youth culture, the ultimate object of courtship rituals remained marriage, the age for which, as we have seen, was at historic lows.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain* (Woburn Press, 1995); Selina Todd, 'Flappers and Factory Lads: Youth and Youth Culture in Inter-war Britain' in *History Compass*, 4 (2006).

<sup>174</sup> Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, p. 1; Lawrence, *Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain*, p. 273; Todd, *Flappers and Factory Lads*, p. 721.

<sup>175</sup> 1950s grammar school boy Peter Bailey describes his envy of the secondary modern 'teenagers' in Bailey 'Jazz at the Spirella: Coming of Age in Coventry in the 1950s' in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds) *Moments of Modernity*, p. 25; Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Wiley, 1998), pp. 92-93, 119-123. Osgerby discusses the teenager as a working-class category in relation to the middle-class beatnik culture, and how racial subcultures contributed to the Nottingham and Notting Hill riots of the late 1950s; see also Gail Lewis 'From Deepest Kilburn' in Liz Heron (ed) *Truth, Dare, Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, 1985).

<sup>176</sup> Gillian A. M. Mitchell, 'Reassessing 'the Generation Gap': Bill Haley's 1957 Tour of Britain, Inter-Generational Relations and Attitudes to Rock 'n' Roll in the Late 1950s' in *Twentieth Century British History*, 24 (2013), pp. 31-32.

<sup>177</sup> Ayres, *Masculinities in Post-War Liverpool*, p. 158.

<sup>178</sup> Barry Miles, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now* (Secker & Warburg, 1997), p. 150.

<sup>179</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had it so Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (Abacus, 2006), pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>180</sup> Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 150-151.

These patterns provide important contexts for our understandings of the interpersonal relationships of fathers and sons in post-war families. In their recent edited collection *Parenthood Between Generations: Transforming Reproductive Cultures*, Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi have provided a useful roadmap for how such intergenerational dynamics can be historically located.<sup>181</sup> Pooley and Qureshi shift ideas of reproduction beyond the 'biological making of babies' and towards the 'sociocultural production of persons who grow and unfurl gradually, over a life-time'.<sup>182</sup> Chapter One explores further their focus on intergenerational transmission between parents and their adult children, which, they argue, should be viewed as a set of processes, which are multi-directional and ongoing. They argue that 'generation' takes three forms. Firstly, a vertical family relationship, which they conceptualise as 'a palimpsest formed of multiple roles and identities, which can accumulate, overlap, be written over, or gradually fade away'.<sup>183</sup> Cultural historians who have traced a linear transition from boyhood to manhood highlight rites of passage, such as wearing long trousers, smoking, leaving school and entering work or the armed forces, or having a first drink in a pub with one's father.<sup>184</sup> However, conceiving of such experiences as layers of experience, rather than milestones to be passed, allows a fuller account of male experience at different points along the life-course.

Pooley and Qureshi's second understanding of generation is a 'sense of horizontal commonality'.<sup>185</sup> This acknowledges the purchase of generational identity as a 'powerful cultural trope', while emphasising the individual agency of people to choose if and how to engage with contemporary cultural norms and expectations in opposition to those of their parents.<sup>186</sup> Their final category is 'linear narrative of change', referring to the sense in which a person feels that they are located along a trajectory of an 'ever-

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<sup>181</sup> Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations: Transforming Reproductive Cultures* (Berghahn, 2016).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>183</sup> Pooley and Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations*, p. 15.

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Ayres, *Masculinities in Post-War Liverpool*, p. 153; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 122; Hilary Young 'Being a Man: Everyday Masculinities in Twentieth Century Scotland' in Lynn Abrams and Callum Brown (eds) *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland*, 2010), pp. 137-138. I am grateful to the late Hayley Maher, who alerted me to Stan Barstow's evocative fictional account of a 1960s first father-son drink in a pub. See Stan Barstow, *A Kind of Loving* (Parthian, 2010), pp. 148-153.

<sup>185</sup> Pooley and Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations*, p. 12.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

greater 'modernisation' imposed on each successive generation of families'.<sup>187</sup> In this final sense, they argue convincingly that 'the most common chronological narrative through which changing intergenerational relations have been understood is a teleological, homogenous story of the making of 'modern' child-centred parenting'.<sup>188</sup> But as the articles in their collection confirm, while such a narrative may be seductive, it underestimates the agency of ordinary parents, whose self-awareness and heterogeneity of experience disrupt top-down, global narratives of modernisation, professionalization and standardisation.<sup>189</sup>

The emotional lives of fathers and sons in this dissertation can be located against Pooley and Qureshi's three-pronged definition of generation: vertical, palimpsestuous relationships; horizontal social and cultural commonalities; and relationships with linear narratives of change. I will agree with Pooley and Qureshi that a mid to late-century teleological shift towards 'modern' parenting appears contested at the level of intersubjective experience. Indeed, for fathers – as opposed to mothers – cultural discourses of parenting had even less impact. Both fathers and sons drew on experiences shared horizontally with their generational cohorts, particularly regarding education, social and class identity. Like these horizontal connections, vertical relationships were particular and personal, growing over time. However, universally, they shared a commitment to intergenerational legacies of male breadwinning.

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### *Absence and Presence: Femininity, Sexuality and Race*

Following Roper, Tosh, Scott and others, my account of gender views masculinity as relational. This is first and foremost a history of fathers and sons' relationships with each other, but also with other family members, with their wider social worlds, and with their social power. Fathers' relationships with their wives, and sons' with their mothers, are a constant presence in the margins of these narratives. In discussions of

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p 17.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-20.

the early years of childcare, education and everyday domestic life they routinely emerge in the foreground, and the story often becomes one of fatherly absence. In five of the interviews with fathers, wives were present, lending their voices to the histories that unfolded; occasionally, they took over to flesh out details of home lives their husbands were not privy to. Nine of the sons interviewed had sisters, though none was interviewed themselves. Like their mothers, girls emerge in the margins of these stories, most notably in conversations about relative academic success and career prospects. However, while mothers and daughters are axiomatically fundamental to any history of the family, the protagonists of this story are fathers and sons; they were the principal subjects of the interviews and the questions were oriented towards them.<sup>190</sup>

I presumed all the men interviewed to have been cisgender heterosexuals in so far as none identified otherwise and all were or had been married to women. In some respects, sexual orientation was of little significance for these fathers and sons in terms of their social relationships and constructions of selfhood. On the other hand, however, the heteronormativity of their lives was overwhelming. They did not consider their sexuality or relation between biological sex and gender to be significant aspects of social identity.<sup>191</sup> However, as I discuss in Chapter Two, their cisgender heterosexuality was fundamentally constitutive of fathers' reflections on their family lives and the aspirations they had for their sons.

All of the fathers and sons were white-British. There were both practical and intellectual reasons for not interviewing fathers and sons from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. In the decades after the war, migrant families remained a small minority of the population, making recruitment of participants challenging. There are also cultural barriers to pursuing social research in some migrant communities.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> For work on mothers and daughters in post-war Britain, see, for example, Lynn Abrams 'Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the "Good woman" in 1950s and 1960s Britain' in N. Christie and M. Gauvreau (eds) *The Sixties and Beyond: De-Christianisation in North America and Western Europe 1945-2000* (University of Toronto, 2013); Davis, *Modern Motherhood*; Liz Heron, *Truth, Dare or Promise*; Steedman, *Landscape*.

<sup>191</sup> On gay parenthood, see Robert Pralat 'Between Future Families and Families and Origin – Talking about Gay Parenthood Across Generations' in Pooley and Qureshi (eds) *Parenthood Between Generations*.

<sup>192</sup> Jan Mckenley, *Seven Black Men: An Ecological Study of Education and Parenting* (Aduma Books, 2005), p. xiv.



Inclusion of a limited number of fathers and sons from different backgrounds risked tokenising and homogenising non-white experiences. Moreover, as other studies of non-white-British parents have shown, experiences of migration are distinctive and meriting of more attention than space has allowed here.<sup>193</sup> I shall return to these themes in more detail with reflections on whiteness as an interpretive lens through which to see post-war father-son relationships in the conclusion.

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#### 4. Dissertation Structure

The chapter structure falls into two sections. The next two chapters, *Emotional Histories* and *Normal, Ordinary Family Life*, address methodology and a general overview of the father-son experiences in families respectively. After that, the following three chapters, *Particular and Peripheral Parenthood*, *'Education, education, education'*, and *'Labours of Leisure'*, are collectively structured loosely around the trajectory of the life-course, reflecting the chronology of father-son relationships from birth through childhood and into adulthood.

Chapter One examines the retrospectivity of oral history in detail, discussing the contexts for the interviews, including the materiality and spatiality of the interview settings, contemporary socio-political milieus, and the life-stages of the interviewees. I also analyse the intersubjective narrative content of the interviews using textual and psychoanalytic interpretive strategies. Chapter Two dissects classed and gendered concepts of 'normal' and 'ordinary' as discursive scripts fathers and sons engage with to locate their family relationships, and their family's relationships with society from the perspectives of later life. Chapter Three discusses continuities of fatherly parenting practices across the mid-century period, arguing that the post-war proliferation of child-centred expert discourse had little impact on men. I locate men's experiences of fatherhood in relation to the experiences of their wives and children, which, together,

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<sup>193</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (University of California Press, 2012); Punita Chowbey and Sarah Salway (2016) 'I Feel My Dad Every Moment!' - Memory, Emotion and Embodiment in British South Asian Fathering Practices' in Pooley and Qureshi (eds) *Parenthood Between Generations*; Joanna Herbert (2008) 'Masculinity and Migration: Life Stories of East African Men' in Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster (eds) *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-war Britain* (Ashgate, 2008); Lewis, *From Deepest Kilburn*; McKenley, *Seven Black Men*.

illustrate the normativity of male breadwinning and the tendency of father-child relations to grow, reciprocally, across the life-course. In a period that loosely witnessed the life-span of tripartite education, I examine the impact of educational change on families in the state sector, alongside patterns of continuity for privately educated boys – the subject of Chapter Four. As most fathers did not benefit from the post-war reforms, their sons' experiences of education provided tangible markers of intergenerational change, which produced freighted emotional sites of pride, regret, engagement and distance. Chapter Five picks up where Chapter Four finishes, documenting the early careers of sons upon leaving education; in many families, it was this moment, the transition from boyhood to adulthood, education to work, that prompted the greatest fatherly interest and engagement. I also examine feelings towards work across the life-course, at sites of intergenerational connection including the transmission of a strong work ethic, and in material and symbolic traces in aspects of and childhood play. In the Conclusion, I reflect further on 'presences and absences' in the study, as well as scope for further investigations. Before all of this, there follows a brief introduction to each of the families.

## **5. The Fathers and Sons**

### *Fred and Phil Avery (brothers)*

Fred Avery is the oldest son in the study, born in 1939. Phil was born in 1945. Their father, Jack, who was a builder, died in 1966. They were raised first in Brighton, then Burgess Hill, a small town in Sussex. Both brothers failed their 11-plus exams. Fred went to technical school, then to technical college; Phil, to one of the first comprehensives. Fred went on to become a quantity surveyor, Phil, a driver and worker for children with special needs. When I interviewed them together, in 2016, they lived next door to each other on the site of the cottages their father had renovated for the family before his death.

### *Alan and Mark Birchwood (ps.)*

Alan Birchwood was born in 1927. His son Mark, born in 1961, had three sisters, one of whom died young of leukaemia. The family lived in a small town in Surrey, in the same house I interviewed them both in, separately, in 2016. Alan was first an Electrical

Engineer, then Mechanical Engineer. Mark went to grammar school and university, and after several false starts in his career ended up a regional manager for an industrial construction company. Along with the Coverleys, they are the only family in the study who began the period middle-class (others, as we shall see, experienced social mobility over the course of the period).

#### Peter and Andrew Coverley

Peter and Andrew Coverley, born in 1915 and 1950 respectively, lived in Cheshire during the post-war period. At first, Peter was a joiner. He moved down from Scotland to go to train to be a teacher, where he settled into a new career and started a family. Andrew passed his 11-plus and went to grammar school, thereupon becoming complacent. He remained the only one of four siblings not to go to university. Following a peripatetic early career after disappointing school results, he eventually became a sound engineer. At the time of interviewing, in 1986, his family lived more modestly than he had during his own childhood.

#### Henry and Martin Curd

Henry Curd, a pattern maker, was born in 1915, his son Martin, in 1946. They lived in suburban London in the post-war decades. Martin was a bright child, who nonetheless failed his 11-plus because, he said, he wanted to emulate his father's skilled manual labour. However, he passed the follow-up examination at 13 and became a heating engineer, eventually running his own business. In common with every family in the 1980s cohort, they were interviewed separately; their wives, respectively Elsie and Carol, were also present.

#### Norman and Charlie Henry (ps.)

The Henrys are the first of two upper-middle-class families in the study. Norman, born in 1925, was a major general and director of a number of influential institutions. Both he and Charlie, born in 1960, boarded at public (prestigious, fee-paying) schools; Charlie went on to university and a lucrative career in financial insurance. In the post-war decades, they lived the typical life of an army family, moving regularly around the south-east of England and abroad during Charlie's childhood. Both Norman and his wife

had personal servants, and Charlie and his two sisters had an *au pair*. I interviewed them together, at Charlie's house in London, in 2017.

#### Arthur and Stephen Laws

Arthur, born 1923, and Stephen, born 1955, are one of four father-son pairs I interviewed from the North Shields area of Tyneside, just north of Newcastle. After working with the Merchant Navy, Arthur eventually became a manager in the local optical works. Stephen failed his 11-plus and his mother went back to work as a dinner lady to pay for the fees to send him as a day-boarder to private school. His brighter sister remained in the state sector. Stephen went on to become an international sales manager for an industrial paint manufacturer. I interviewed them both together, in 2017.

#### Norman and Stephen Livingstone

Norman Livingstone was born in 1935, his father was a miner. His was one of the first school years to take the 11-plus (he failed and went to a secondary modern); his son Stephen, born in 1958, was part of the first intake into the new local comprehensive school. In common with all the other North Shields fathers, Norman had a spell in the Merchant Navy, after which he became an engineer. Stephen performed well at school, went to art college and eventually became an artist and teacher. When I interviewed them together, in 2017, Norman's wife Muriel was also present.

#### Mike and David Saddington

Mike Saddington, born in 1930, was posted in Malta with the Merchant Navy during David's infancy, but he moved back to England before David started school. Mike then worked his way up to becoming a foreman for a variety of different companies. David, born in 1951, was a bright boy and avid reader. He passed his 11-plus, went to grammar school and university, eventually becoming a business studies teacher. The Saddingtons grew up in Tyneside, where I interviewed them both, separately, in 2017.

#### Jack and David Shotton

David, born in 1968, is the only son in the study who succeeded his father in the family business. Jack, born in 1930, had invented a type of extractor fan, for use in the shipping

industry, during the 1960s. David now manages the company that manufactures them. Like his father and grandfather before him, David had always been more interested in working with his hands than with academic work. I interviewed them both together, in Jack's home in North Shields in 2017.

#### Sidney and Alan Sorrell

Sidney, born 1918, and Alan, born 1942, lived in the West Midlands in the decades following the war, as they did when they were interviewed, separately, in the 1980s. Sidney was a window cleaner, whose income alone was not enough to support the family. Alan used to help his mother with work from the local press-stud factory, and was often looked after by his grandmother. He failed his 11-plus, went to a secondary modern school, and eventually became a self-employed joiner and carpenter.

#### Bill and John Taylor (ps.)

The eldest of four brothers, John, born in 1955, was the first of his family to go to grammar school and university. His father Bill, born in 1926, was a motor mechanic. I interviewed them separately in suburban west London, which is where they both have always lived. Bill's wife, Edith, was present for Bill's interview. She worked long, anti-social hours when John was young and he was frequently looked after by grandparents, aunts and uncles. After leaving higher education, John went on to work in Information Technology.

#### Harry and Steve Tillett

The Tilletts lived in the East Midlands in the post-war decades. Harry, born in 1929, was a foreman in a timber yard. A little like Andrew Coverley, Steve, born 1953, was a bright but complacent boy; he passed his 11-plus with ease and went on to underachieve. Single at the time of his interview in the 1980s, he alternated between temporary roles and travel. Harry's wife was present for his interview.

#### Peter and Roger Wilkins (ps.)

Peter, born 1930, and Roger, born 1960, were the only father and son affected by divorce. Peter's wife, Kathleen, left him in the late 1960s, taking Roger and his sister with her. However, she stayed in the Cambridgeshire village they lived in, moving in

first with her mother, then her new partner. Much of Roger's childhood was characterised by weekends spent on his father's farm on the outskirts of the village. Despite the disruption caused by the break-up, Roger's and Kathleen's families remained committed churchgoers (Kathleen was the village vicar's daughter).

### Edward and Arthur Winn

Edward and Arthur Winn (born respectively 1917 and 1942) both went to board at public schools, though unlike their upper-middle-class counterparts, the Henrys, they did not have multiple servants. Edward managed a farm in rural Scotland, and, unimpressed with the options available locally, sent Arthur to school more than 200 miles away in Wales. Edward's wife, who was present at their interview in 1986, lamented the effect of this arrangement on the family's closeness. Like Andrew Coverley had, Arthur went on to live more modestly than his parents had, becoming a policeman and settling in Manchester.

# Chapter One.

## Emotional Histories

This chapter explores the utility of oral history for telling intimate stories of intergenerational relationships across life-courses. I set out my methodological approach, which focuses principally on the analysis of two cohorts of oral history interviews, drawing on passages that introduce several of the father-son relationships encountered in the rest of the dissertation. I argue that rather than a ‘history of emotions’, which can imply a confinement of emotions to past historical moments, fathers and sons’ reflections are better described as ‘emotional histories’, which are intersubjective and under perpetual negotiation. Interviewees’ experiences of parenting engage with cultural scripts that can be located historically; however, they are also informed fundamentally by present-day attitudes and behaviours. In the course of interviews, historic social relationships are assessed across life-courses, from the vantage points of middle and old-age. After first outlining some of the opportunities and challenges of oral history, explaining my sampling and recruitment in more detail, and discussing the relationship of oral history with the history of emotions, the chapter is organised around two areas: ‘Contexts’ and ‘Dialogues’. In Contexts, I examine the materiality of interviews’ physical settings, the lifestages of my subjects at the time of interviewing, and the interviews’ contemporary socio-political circumstances. In Dialogues, I consider the narrated content of the interviews, including linguistic forms used by the respondents, uses of humour and nostalgia, and the intersubjectivity of the interviewer-interviewee dynamic. I argue that men’s reflections on their family lives are bound by the particularity of their relationships, understandings of historic normative gendered attitudes and behaviours, and the present-day contexts in which they are recalled and retold.

### 1. Oral History, Emotions and Research Design

The methodology for this study is inextricably intertwined with its thematic content and my intellectual arguments. Every familial relationship has a life-course, but

post-war father-son relationships had a particular tendency to grow closer as babies grew into infants, children, adolescents and young adults; whereas mother-child relationships tended to be more intense from pregnancy and birth.<sup>1</sup> As such, the retrospectivity of oral history offers promising opportunities for men to reflect on how their filial relationships matured over time. As Strange found in her analysis of working-class autobiography, from the perspectives of adulthood, children were able to reassess their fathers' qualities, locate them socially and emotionally, and consider their historic relationships with them.<sup>2</sup> For Strange, such perspectives had particular resonance when offered by sons who, as adults, had become fathers and breadwinners themselves. Similarly, in their contemporary history of attitudes towards sex, Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher found oral history interviewees' dialogues with the present to be 'productive, rather than distorting', because they illuminated powerful feelings about historic sex lives in relation to contemporary cultural norms.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as recent psychological research into memory has suggested, reminiscences in older age may appear more frequently and more vividly than at earlier lifestages.<sup>4</sup> Oral history interviews with men in middle and old age thus offer productive positions from which to reflect on narratives of the post-war decades, which also spill over into periods before and since. As Paul Thompson remarked of his '100 families' study, which, as we shall see, provided five father-son pairs for this research, 'telling one's own life story required not only recounting directly remembered experience, but also drawing on information and stories transmitted across the generations, both about the years too early in childhood to remember, and also further back in time beyond Introduction's own birth'.<sup>5</sup>

As I discuss below, under 'Retrospective Contexts', such dynamics complicate a theoretical premise that underpins approaches to histories of emotions. Whether approaching emotions from a more cognitive-psychological, or socio-cultural perspective, it is generally agreed that an individual's emotional behaviour results from a combination of raw feeling and a judgment or evaluation. In turn, this evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> The anthropological undepinnings of this view can be attributed to Margaret Mead. See Jackson, *Fatherhood*, p. 101. The pattern is returned to in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, pp. 45-47.

<sup>3</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Douwe Draaisma, *The Nostalgia Factory: Memory, Time and Ageing* (Yale, 2008), pp. 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Family Myth, Models, and Denials*, p. 13.



derives from a person's understanding of her or his contemporary environment.<sup>6</sup> Emotions are thus historicised; they are products of a biological response to a particular socio-cultural moment. It is this insight that led Lucien Febvre and the *Annales School* to call for greater engagement with historical study of emotions in 1938, and further, to urge historians to eschew present-day cultural filters when interpreting historical evidence.<sup>7</sup> Febvre's work has led to productive framings of historical social organisation and cultural normativity, such as William Reddy's 'emotional regimes', Barbara Rosenwein's 'emotional communities' and Carol and Peter Stearns' 'emotionology'.<sup>8</sup> However, while oral historians have in turn profited from these ideas, my own findings echo the concerns of Michael Roper, who has called for greater engagement with present-day emotional processes in the production of historical work.<sup>9</sup>

In oral history interviews (and in myriad other social interactions), as well as applying historical contingency to emotions, men refine and recompose their selfhoods and social relationships in real time. Nan Estad considers subjectivity to be 'related to the concepts "self" and "identity", with a crucial distinction: subjectivity emphasises a process of becoming that is never completed... it is based on the principle that one is neither essential nor fixed, but is continually shaped and reshaped in human social exchange'.<sup>10</sup> Margaret Wetherell suggests that, rather than static in time, affective activity is an 'ongoing flow [...] of forming and changing bodyscapes, qualia (subjective states), and actions constantly shifting in response to the changing context'.<sup>11</sup> Such activity informed men's subjectivities, which appeared in motion, and their stories of parenting, which emerged as both historical and biographical. Men's experiences of

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<sup>6</sup> Eiko Ikegami (2011) 'Emotions' in Ulinka Rublack (ed) *A Concise Companion to History* (OUP, 2011), pp. 337-338.

<sup>7</sup> Susan J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out' in *Emotion Review*, 4 (2011), p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent discussion on these concepts, see Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosewein and Peter Stearns' in *History and Theory*, 49 (2010).

<sup>9</sup> On uses of concepts drawn from the history of emotions in oral history studies, see Carrie Hamilton, 'Moving Feelings: Nationalism, Feminism and the Emotions of Politics' in *Oral History*, 38 (2010); Sheena Rolph and Dorothy Atkinson, 'Emotion in Narrating the History of Learning Disability' in *ibid.* For a critique of these approaches, see Michael Roper, 'The Unconscious Work of History' in *Cultural and Social History*, 11 (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Jeanne Boydston, 'Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis' in *Gender & History*, 20 (2008), pp. 568-569.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Wetherell, 'Trends in the Turn to Affect: A Social Psychological Critique' in *Body & Society*, 21 (2015), p. 147.

father-son relationships were processes of constant negotiations with the present, as well as with the past.

In her enquiry into late Victorian and Edwardian fatherhood, Strange declined to utilise oral history (interviews conducted in the 1970s were a possible primary source) because of the interlocutor's contemporary cultural and intellectual biases. She preferred 'deliberate composition' of autobiography, in which accounts of fathers were 'never accidental'.<sup>12</sup> For her period, the option of conducting new interviews herself was unavailable. An obvious advantage for contemporary historians of life narratives over those of earlier periods is the possibility of conducting new oral history interviews, in which the researcher has a greater degree of control over the direction of the source material. My decision both to conduct new interviews and to revisit existing testimony was motivated by the epistemological potential for critical engagement with each method. As this chapter will illustrate, the opportunity to recruit respondents, design questionnaires and conduct interviews presents unrivalled access to historical experiences. In this respect, new interviews help compensate for – if not entirely dispense with – the drawbacks expressed by historians of earlier periods, for whom access to historical subjectivities frequently demands reading 'against the grain' of emotionally opaque sources.<sup>13</sup>

The uncovering of emotional lives in oral history interviews can still require imaginative interpretive strategies; however, the ability to ask questions, in person, to a living source remains unique a privilege. Secondary analysis of existing testimony does not yield such opportunities; however, combined with new interviews, it does create the space for comparative analysis of testimonies produced at different cultural moments, with different intellectual objectives. Critically engaging with my own role, as well as those of earlier interlocutors, has enabled a multidimensional understanding of the contexts and dialogues from which men's testimonies have emerged. In both formats, the historian is required to deal with the precariousness of human memory and the respondents and researchers' performativity in the interview situation.

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<sup>12</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> This is a common concern of historians seeking to access emotional lives. See, for example, Matt, *Current Emotion Research*, p. 119; Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 14; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 198-199.

However, as Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson articulated in their seminal intervention about ‘the myths we live by’:

As soon as we recognise the value of the subjective in individual testimonies, we challenge the accepted categories of history. We reintroduce the emotionality, the fears and fantasies carried by the metaphors of memory... [so that] the individuality of each life story ceases to be an awkward impediment to generalisation, and becomes instead a vital document of the construction of consciousness.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter considers a range of approaches to interpreting such individual subjectivities; the final section, ‘Intersubjective Dialogues’ examines the place of researcher subjectivity – in both new and existing testimony – in the co-creation of these histories.

Before a summary of my research design and sample, it is necessary briefly to reflect on the implications of an oral history of this kind for the history of childhood. Reflecting on the relationships between *adult* children and their parents, Pooley and Qureshi highlight the non-fixity of parental relationships, which, they suggest, remain in perpetual negotiation across the life-course. They describe filial relationships in terms of ‘multi-directional processes’, which see parents and children ‘receiving, reinterpreting or rejecting’ aspects of each other’s lives.<sup>15</sup> They argue that children ‘engage – unequally – in the process of negotiating what is passed down to their generation’.<sup>16</sup> My work departs from theirs in so far as the main tenor of my enquiry has been towards uncovering details of relationships between fathers and their sons *when they were children or adolescents*; however, I share their understanding that filial relationships were characterised by reciprocity as well as imposition. Ventriloquised through the voices of their adult selves, my research has only a partial claim on the documentation of childhood subjective experiences. Historians engaged with children as authors of sources have been able to locate children’s voices more vividly.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Raphael Samuel and Paul Richard Thompson, *The Myths we Live by* (Routledge, 1990), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Pooley and Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7, 8.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Barron and Langhamer, *Feeling through practice*; Carolyn Steedman ‘State-Sponsored Autobiography’ in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds) *Moments of Modernity*; Siân Pooley, ‘Children’s Writing and the Popular Press in England 1876–1914’ in *History Workshop Journal*, 80 (2015).

However, as Mary Jo Maynes argues, '[adult] narratives of childhood can be very telling indeed—not as direct evidence of the experience of children, of course, but rather as sources of insights into the impact and meanings of childhood, and of childhood as a phase of the construction of agency and subjectivity'.<sup>18</sup> Returning again to Pooley and Qureshi's palimpsest metaphor, mentioned in the Introduction, fathers and sons' accounts of sons' childhoods represent layers in the construction of their filial relationships.

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### Research Design and Sample

In Laura Tisdall's work on parenting and post-war British child-centred education she calls for greater engagement with age as category of historical analysis. In the post-war context, she argues that viewing age, like gender, as relational, is a productive framework for understanding processes that saw post-war adults' – mainly mothers' and teachers' – needs subordinated to those of children.<sup>19</sup> One of the principal questions underpinning my own research concerns the relationship between men's respective experiences as children in the interwar period and as fathers after the war. I have aimed to uncover how these experiences of different historical moments were constituted in post-war male filial relationships. Like Tisdall, I have looked to age as a primary category of analysis; studying both fathers and sons, I have also looked to generation. The recruitment strategy for my interviewees was thus oriented around two generations: men who experienced childhood in the inter-war period and became fathers after 1945, and their sons, who experienced childhood and adolescence between 1945 and 1974. Using age and generation, alongside gender, as criteria for inclusion does not preclude attention to class, region or other social categories. However, the conclusions I draw about those categories are mediated through the experiences of fathers and sons of certain ages.

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood' in *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1 (2008), p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Tisdall, 'Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood in England, c. 1945 to c. 1979' in *Contemporary British History*, 31 (2017), pp. 24, 27.

I conducted new interviews with 18 men (eight father-son pairs and one pair of brothers) between 2015 and 2017. They were recruited via social media, advertisements in local press, and approaches to local community organisations including arts centres and history societies. Each pair was given the choice to be interviewed separately or together, resulting in an even split of single and joint interviews. Some have been anonymised, at their request.<sup>20</sup> In terms of secondary analysis, there are very few intergenerational oral history archives available for my period. Fortunately, however, archived transcripts are available of Paul Thompson's landmark '100 families' study (interviews carried out in 1986 and 1988), which tracks four generations of families across the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Applying my age and gender criteria to this archive produced a further 10 men (all father-son pairs).<sup>22</sup> Considering both cohorts together: the majority of fathers were born between the mid to late-1910s and early to mid-1930s; the majority of sons were born between the mid to late-1950s and the early to mid-1960s, with two outliers born, respectively, in 1939 and 1968. My sample size of 28 men in total is small enough to facilitate substantial intimate, qualitative analysis, and large enough to draw lines of comparison and contrast. As I outlined in The Introduction, the father-son testimonies are also located alongside contemporary social research on a much larger scale, including my own secondary analysis of original transcripts and fieldnotes. While it is true to say that my respondents are, by definition, self-selecting, they are perhaps no more so than writers of, for example, diaries or autobiographies. The emotional range of the narratives is testament to the fact that men's decisions to be interviewed were not predicated only on the desire to present accounts of positive, harmonious relationships.

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<sup>20</sup> There were two examples in which one member of the father-son pair requested anonymity and the other did not. In these cases, I have anonymised both.

<sup>21</sup> Families, Social Mobility and Ageing, an Intergenerational Approach, 1900-1988, Paul Thompson and Howard Newby, (1988) *UK Data Service*. It should be noted that not every member of each generation was interviewed by Thompson and his colleagues. Once my age and gender criteria had been applied, only five families emerged as relevant.

<sup>22</sup> Another notable intergenerational oral history has been undertaken by Julia Brannen's and colleagues, from which I draw more selectively. Fatherhood across Generations in Polish, Irish and White British Families, 1920-2010 (2013). Transcripts for this study only became available towards the end of my fourth year. See also Introduction, pp. 17-18.

## 2. Contexts: Material Contexts

In their illuminating oral history of cooking utensils as biographical objects, David Sutton and Michael Hernandez explore the relationship between the durability of material things and certain continuities of family feelings and behaviours.<sup>23</sup> They use the example of a skillet owned by an Illinois man, which, he claimed (it turns out, mistakenly), was once owned by an ancestral uncle, who used it to cook for his regiment in the American Civil War. Despite its erroneous provenance, it had become a 'repository of family history', representing deeply held family values of skill, camaraderie and patriotism.<sup>24</sup> For Jack and David Shotton from North Shields near Newcastle, it was a type of extractor fan, used in shipping, which had particular resonance for their family. Jack had designed the fan while working as a draughtsman in the 1960s, before setting up his own business manufacturing them. Not long after his son David came of age, he decided to go into the family business, which he now runs. Talking me through his decision, David explained that he had never been 'a studying type person – more with my hands', at which point Jack interjected to say 'That was my father to a tee! My father worked with his hands'.<sup>25</sup> For Jack, the skill, ingenuity and craftsmanship that the fan had come to embody spanned three generations of the Shotton family.<sup>26</sup> As a part of the thriving post-war northeast shipping industry, the fan also carried associations with industry and attachment to place, which were strongly gendered. As we shall see in Chapter Five, over the course of the late-twentieth century in Britain, stories of familial succession in business became less common, though a booming post-war economy provided helpful conditions for entrepreneurs. The Shottons demonstrated how values of craftsmanship and enterprise could still bind together multiple generations of men in families. Jack also presented a photograph, in which he stood proudly in a shirt and tie, alongside David, seen in overalls, with the fans (fig. 1). Their dress in the photograph reinforces their gender-normative roles in the design and manufacture of the product. More importantly for Jack and David, the photo

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<sup>23</sup> David Sutton and Michael Hernandez, 'Voices in the Kitchen: Cooking Tools as Inalienable Possessions' in *Oral History*, 35 (2007).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*, March 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Roper highlights white-collar workers' fascination with material products in Roper, *Product Fetishism*.

was a material reminder of how Jack's extractor fan had provided an enduring source of connection for father and son; and in Jack's memory, a connection to an earlier generation too.



*Figure 3: David and Jack Shotton (c. early 1980s)*



As Janis Wilton has cautioned, however, structuring interviews too closely around material culture can have a distorting effect on the way personal histories are remembered.<sup>27</sup> To encourage someone to elucidate on a particular photograph, or heirloom, while it might elicit rich and freighted reflections, may bias a life-story towards certain memories and associations, and away from others. Equally, a material thing that carries particular significance for an interviewee may exist only in memory, its physical presence having faded from view over time. (This was the case with Mike Saddington, whose treasured pipe had its precursor in the form of a toothbrush, which as a child he had pretended to smoke, anticipating his adult male habit). Whether physically present, or in the remembered past, I chose not to lead conversations towards discussions of particular material things. However, it quickly transpired that the materiality of family homes, in which most of my interviews took place, often provided the cues for narrations of certain emotional pasts. For example, the Avery brothers' front window, through which scenes of children playing elicited happy memories and digressions of their own childhood play; or Norman Livingstone's handmade walnut cabinet that had once come crashing to the ground as Stephen and his brother mimicked the Olympic gymnasts on the television.<sup>28</sup> The rooms' material cultures were drawn on incidentally, but the stories they inspired were often among the richest I encountered.

The room in which I interviewed Alan and Mark Birchwood (individually, in succession) also included evidence of adult male craftsmanship. Evidently proud of his own handiwork, Alan, a mechanical engineer, systematically described the room's fixtures and fittings. He chose to explain in some detail the carpentry, plumbing and decorating he had undertaken more than 50 years previously. The badly fitted shelf above the fireplace was singled out as an anomaly; reluctantly, he had employed a builder to install it. Its imperfection had provided an unhappy visual reminder of his decision ever since. For Mark, this material culture provided an example of his father's exemplary skills, against which not only the outsourced builder, but he himself, had fallen short:

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<sup>27</sup> Janis Wilton, 'Telling Objects: Material Culture and Memory in Oral History Interviews' in *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 30 (2008), especially p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> See also Chapter Five, p. 199.



Yeah, I came 'round to borrow something... 'cause he's very good... like, he built that cupboard. What else did he build in here? He built that shelf... he didn't do the brickwork, the brickwork wasn't done to how he wanted it apparently. Anyway... and I like to think... though I haven't done for a while... but I can do indoor decorating, like hanging wallpaper, stuff like that. But... I came around to borrow something... he was having a clear-out of his tools and he said "you don't do so much of the DIY do you?" [pause] I thought I did [laughs], but no, I don't do all the great building projects that he did.<sup>29</sup>

Mark echoes Alan's dissatisfaction. They each refer to a shared memory of poor craftsmanship, whose owner has long faded from view, but from which the brickwork remained as an enduring reminder. The association of the memory with inadequacy prompted feelings of niggling regret for Alan, but for Mark, it triggered conflicting emotions: pride at Alan's pre-eminent DIY skills; and resentment at his father's under-appreciation of his own abilities. The fireplace had been built in the early 1960s, at a time when DIY proficiency was wholly commensurate with normative performances of masculinity in the home.<sup>30</sup> Brickwork was thus, at some level, associated with a cultural model of successful manhood, which had retained some traction for Mark fifty years on. As we shall see below, it became apparent over the rest of the interview that Alan's impressive practical skill was just one of many areas of family life that left Mark regretful of having fallen short of his father's example.

Brickwork also had symbolic resonance for brothers Fred and Phil Avery. In their seventies at the time of interviewing, they lived next door to each other on the same site their father, who died in 1966, had renovated when they were children. Phil explained: 'That brickwork out there, can you see? [gestures to window] That's dad's handiwork. We've been tempted to make the drive wider... but every time, we think: no, we can't knock dad's bricks down'.<sup>31</sup> The brickwork carried particular significance for Fred, who as a teenager was apprenticed as a builder by his father and went on to succeed him in the industry. Like many of his peers in the late 1950s, however, he

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<sup>29</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*, April 2016.

<sup>30</sup> See also Chapter Five.

<sup>31</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*, April 2016.

traded blue-collar for white-collar work and became a quantity surveyor. Phil also helped out his father on building sites; although, via a more circuitous career path, he eventually emerged as a care-worker and driver for children with special needs. Despite undertaking several renovation jobs on the cottages since his father died, in agreement with Phil, Fred had felt obliged to leave this particular wall standing. During the 1950s and 1960s, building work remained a key site of adult male manual labour at a time of creeping automatisation and the growth of clerical and managerial jobs. Neither Fred nor Phil followed their father as builders, but their preservation of his wall confirmed their mutual reverence for his practical skill and commemoration of his early death.



*Figure 4: Fred and Phil Avery (outside Fred's cottage, 2016)*

Both the Averys' and Birchwood's bricks had come to represent their fathers' ingenuity and devotion to their family homes. They remained as powerful symbols of fatherly protection and provision, and for Fred in particular, of parental nurturing and guidance. Daniel Miller suggests material things have a 'strange and little understood humility [...] [they are] concrete, upfront, evident to the eye. Yet they work generally as background, as that which frames behaviour and atmosphere [...] they hide the power to determine the way you feel'.<sup>32</sup> In the course of my oral history interviews in family homes, some of this power was revealed. Across classes, DIY in the post-war period provided welcome outlets for men whose practical and creative skills were becoming

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<sup>32</sup> Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Polity, 2008), p. 163.

less valued at work.<sup>33</sup> Its latent association with adult masculinity has given the materiality of many family homes a certain gendered resonance for many fathers and sons. As the Shottons and Averys examples illustrate, practical skill and ingenuity at work also remained powerful binding agents of male intergenerational emotional connection. Although each family's circumstances were different, the material culture men drew on in their interviews represented their negotiations of culturally pervasive modes of masculinity in the past and present.

### 3. Contexts: Retrospective Contexts

The retrospectivity of oral history requires the historian to engage with the complex relationship between history and memory; in particular, to explore the tension between personal – or individual – and 'social' memories, which, broadly conceived, can refer to the aspects of a culture which its society has remembered collectively.<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt argues that 'the processes of social memory are ones which are always cross-weaving the social and the individual, producing pools of retrospective knowledge and understanding that are available both for social use and for personal appropriation.'<sup>35</sup> Anna Green has emphasised oral history respondents' conscious roles in the channelling and reproduction of these processes. She implores oral historians to 're-assert the value of individual remembering, and the capacity of the conscious self to contest and critique cultural scripts or discourses'.<sup>36</sup> Green's rallying cry for the 'conscious self' is a riposte to approaches that have privileged cultural or psychoanalytic interpretations (examining *unconscious* communication) of life narratives. As we shall see below, cultural scripts and unconscious communication are important interpretive tools in the analysis of these father-son testimonies; however, Green's caution has particular purchase when approaching oral histories of parenting told from the vantage points of old and middle-age. Having reached a life-stage past the point at which they have decided whether or not to become parents themselves, my interviewees

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<sup>33</sup> Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*. This intervention is examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>34</sup> This definition is a broad summary of the numerous approaches to ideas of 'social', 'collective' and 'cultural' memory. For more detail, see Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (MUP, 2007), pp. 13-19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>36</sup> Anna Green, 'Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates' in *Oral History*, 32 (2004), pp. 42-43.

consciously engaged with present and past cultural scripts of fatherhood and childhood when composing their narratives. As Mark Birchwood remarked when struggling to remember whether or not he listened to the children's radio show *Listen With Mother*, with his mother:

Erm... so some of that might be... I certainly remember the words being said, but a lot of the memories, you can gather from reading stuff that happened back then – and think that must have happened to me, rather than 'that actually did happen to me', so... I guess you must come across that a lot in your job... yeah.<sup>37</sup>

Joanna Bornat has shown that interviews with older people do not always lead to past tensions being resolved; rather, they form part of ongoing negotiations with personal histories, into which the oral history interview has given temporary access.<sup>38</sup> The relationship between individual and social memories remains 'live' and in motion; the interviewees' process of distilling and reproducing is conscious, as well as unconscious and cultural.

It was not unusual for fathers and sons to consciously historicise their feelings by locating past experiences in opposition to present-day cultural norms. As we saw earlier, concepts drawn from the history of emotions, which attempt to account for changes to emotional norms and behaviour over time, can be helpful to think with in these contexts: for example, Carol and Peter Stearns' 'emotionology', which refers to the cultural standards against which historical expressions of emotion can be assessed.<sup>39</sup> In the 1950s, Martin Francis has compared Harold MacMillan's restraint and control with Anthony Eden's openness and upset to explain the former's success after the Suez crisis of 1956.<sup>40</sup> Such qualities were desirable antitheses to the chaos and disorder of war, and were felt to be suitable masculine traits with which to combat a variety of contemporary ills, from the imagined deviance of homosexuality and the hysteria of

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<sup>37</sup> ELL05, Mark Birchwood.

<sup>38</sup> Joanna Bornat, 'Remembering and Reworking Emotions: The Reanalysis of Emotion in an Interview' in *Oral History*, 38 (2010).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards' in *The American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), p. 813.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951–1963' in *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), p. 359.

American anti-Communist McCarthyism.<sup>41</sup> But, as Francis acknowledges, the desirability of these cultural values was soon to be superseded. Taking a longer view, Thomas Dixon identifies the 1940s and 1950s as Britain's high point of emotional restraint, before a return to the sort of open displays of emotion and self-indulgence that had last been culturally acceptable in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries.<sup>42</sup>

However, while it was sometimes possible to map personal experiences with mid-century cultural norms, or 'emotionology' – whether emotional restraint, openness or something else – often, it was individual and interpersonal emotional trajectories over time that had more salience. Men reflected on the extent to which their feelings and behaviour had subscribed to, or transgressed, historic prevailing emotional standards, but they also drew strength from maintaining the belief that their feelings had remained consistent from the remembered past to the interview in the present. Telling their emotional histories across life-courses, they were more likely to stress continuities of feeling than to reflect that their lives had adapted to in response to cultural change.

For Phil and Fred Avery, it was a sense of childhood freedom in the face of adult authoritarianism that best exemplified the difference between historic and present-day emotional cultures. Phil and Fred happily recalled 1950s experiences of mischievous childhood games, which they characterised as ingenious, imaginative and full of masculine adventure. They consciously located their exploits amid a strict parental culture, in which punishment was 'all physical';<sup>43</sup> thus making their childhood selves appear all the more daring. As Phil commented, proudly: 'you see, that's the difference between the kids today and us: we never got caught!'<sup>44</sup> Remembering a similar period, John Taylor echoed the Averys' disapproval of children today, but his childhood experience appeared much more restricted. He explained: 'We did none of this staying up all night like kids do now. I'd go up to bed, read in bed, to keep out the way!'<sup>45</sup> His

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 358, 363-364.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 5; 263-267; see also Francis, *Tears*, pp. 382-385.

<sup>43</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*, October 2015.

tendency to 'keep out the way' endured, as he explained: 'I've never been one for becoming part of a group really... I've always felt on the outside of groups, even at parties'.<sup>46</sup> At some level, the Averys' reflections correspond with a tendency towards of nostalgia, which, it has been argued, might be invoked to assert working-class agency in circumstances of material hardship or to stake a claim for childhood 'lost freedoms' in the face of an increasingly restrictive and surveillant culture.<sup>47</sup> However, nostalgic interpretations are disrupted in John Taylor's remarks, which illustrate how subjectively memories of parental authority are processed depending on the particular nature of the childhood social relationships. Common to both reflections, were continuities of feeling into adulthood. Phil remembered his childhood self as cunning, but also that 'kids today' have failed to live up to their standards. Similarly, John's memory of feeling isolated was reflected in his present-day attitudes towards groups and parties.

For father and son Peter and Roger Wilkins, it was important to frame an intimate memory about riding on Peter's tractor in an era less encumbered by rules and regulation. Their reflections echo those of the Averys in terms of childhood freedoms, but unlike the Averys, who positioned their childhood selves in opposition to their parents, for the Wilkins, such freedoms were mediated in a site of intergenerational closeness. Roger explained:

To begin with my dad used to be with me. When I was too young to actually reach the pedals, I used to sit between his legs, with hands on the steering wheel, and he used to guide... guide me so I didn't do anything stupid. But he was the one controlling the speed and the brakes, and things like that [smiles]. It was all good fun though, good experience... but it was a... let me think [pause]. You see these days, when so many farms have accidents on them, things like that... when I was doing it with my dad, they didn't really think about health and safety, all this kind of stuff.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> On the political and empowering uses of nostalgia, see Jones, *The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-war England*, pp. 368-369. Certainly, as we shall see in Chapter Two, the Averys experienced material hardship in their childhoods. See also Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> ELL07, *Roger Wilkins*, 2nd February 2017.

Roger's father Peter, in his eighties at the time of interviewing, was not sentimental about farming – he approved of the new homes being built on the fields he tended as a younger man; but he was nostalgic for the time he spent with his young son. Interviewed separately, unprompted, he also described how Roger would spend all day with him on the tractor and shared his views on 'health and safety'. When I asked if Roger was helping him with work on the farm, he replied: 'Well, no, he just used to be with me... no, he didn't do anything, just... with me, you know. You'd never be able to do it now – health and safety and all that'.<sup>49</sup> When I had asked Roger whether his sister had also ridden the tractor, he replied that she had not: her only engagement with the farm was when her father taught her how to look after the chickens. In Peter's account however, he described how all three of them would go on the tractor, and he produced a photograph to illustrate it. Both Roger and Peter took pleasure in remembering moments of father-son bonding in a past less inhibited by 'health and safety'. The absence of Roger's sister from his recollections illustrates the way cultural understandings of gender-appropriate childhood behaviour can distort individual memories. More poignantly, however, it confirms his intention of preserving this intimate recollection as something only he and his father shared. His smile upon remembering it shows how the feelings it evoked had endured.

Mark Birchwood also recalled happy childhood memories of parenting, but his negotiations of them in the present were held uneasily. As we saw earlier, the quality of his father Alan's handiwork elicited abiding feelings of inadequacy in Mark. Such feelings also extended to Mark's reflections on fatherhood, in which he again compared past with present. Mark described a blissful 1960s childhood, characterised by joyful holidays, a loving and supportive home-life, and a father whose kindness and patience he thought to be model qualities for parenthood. On becoming a father himself, Mark aspired to emulate his parents, but he also reflected on his abilities with some misgivings, as he explained: 'I don't think I've done such a good job as being a parent as they have'.<sup>50</sup> Mark's negative self-reflections illustrate the different turns emotional inheritances can take as they are passed down generations. Despite having cause to reflect on a happy upbringing, his memories also amplified feelings of self-doubt.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

John Taylor bore his emotional inheritance even more weightily. As we saw earlier, his reflections evoked an isolated figure with few friends, who often played alone. John's account contrasted with that of his father, Bill, who was more inclined to emphasise his family's enduring closeness. However, although he was never punished physically as a child, John remembered being frightened of his father and feeling distanced from his mother, who in his infancy worked as a night nurse and slept during the day. Asked to compare his views on children in the present-day, with life as a child in the 1950s and 1960s, he explained:

When I see children nowadays, I'm er, I'm quite glad, I mean, I'm quite glad we didn't have any children 'cause I can't stand the little brutes [laughs]. I don't think I would have made a good father. But I might have done, but never... we'll never, never find out. But I suspect that because my father... I don't, as I said earlier, I don't recall my mum and dad hugging me, or being particularly, you know, physical with me.... erm... I would have probably been like that to my own children, had I had any... which... without wanting to be... and.... I would have passed on the traits that my parents had passed on to me, I would have passed on to me own children.... You know, psychologically and emotionally, and it probably wouldn't have been a good thing.<sup>51</sup>

Just as John had reflected that his childhood feelings of isolation had continued into adulthood, he also articulated more recent attitudes towards fatherhood in response to past experiences. As we shall see in Chapter Two, it is possible to historicise John's feelings both against a culture of 1950s emotional restraint *and* a 1970s shift towards greater self-reflection, openness and tendency to look to families and childhoods for explanations of psychological discord as adults.<sup>52</sup> However, his reflections, which were in many respects exceptional compared with other testimonies, appear to owe more to the particular nature of parenting practices in his family. At a simply human level, his comments provide a sad and touching illustration of the emotional legacies experiences of parenting can cast. As with the Averys and Wilkinses, the experiences of Mark Birchwood and John Taylor illustrate the importance of present-day contexts in

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<sup>51</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

<sup>52</sup> See also Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp. 223-226; Dixon, *Weeping Brittonia* pp. 257-272; Francis, *Tears*, pp. 381-383; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 266.



providing psychic, social and cultural markers for making conscious judgments on the past. The retrospectivity of these accounts provides insight into experiences of social and cultural change over time, which are nevertheless informed fundamentally by continuities of thoughts, feelings and behaviours deriving from longstanding child-parent relationships.

#### 4. Dialogues: Narrative Traits

In Chapter Three, we shall examine in more detail the oral history concept of 'composure', in which the orality of the testimony, including pauses and laughter come under scrutiny.<sup>53</sup> Here, I consider certain textual elements of the narratives, which, upon re-reading, provide clues to the nature of social relationships within and outside families.<sup>54</sup> In Strange's study, she compares what fathers meant 'to me', with what they did 'for me' to indicate, respectively, the power of men's personal values and social obligations to their sons.<sup>55</sup> I have found interviewees' uses of pronouns similarly powerful indicators of feeling and expression. Instinctive uses of 'they', as opposed to 'we', for example, often represented family unity or division. Mark Birchwood remembered how, as a boy growing up in the 1960s, his parents had bought him a toy action figure, 'Brains', from the television show Thunderbirds. For them it was preferable to the popular Action Man toys, which were not commensurate with their views about the military (Mark's father Alan was a critic of Britain's involvement in international conflicts). Any upset, however, was mitigated by the Birchwood parents' willingness to compromise by way of a collective, family strategy. Mark, having been used to 'close substitutes' for toys deemed too expensive, remembered: 'I thought, oh, this is a close substitute for an Action Man, and so we did the thing of saying... I bought Action Man clothes for Brains out of Thunderbirds, so he was dressed in camouflage and had a gun, and everything like that'.<sup>56</sup> The 'we' in this sentence betrayed a closeness Mark felt to his parents, which was also reflected in my interview with Alan. For

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<sup>53</sup> Chapter Three, pp. 148-149.

<sup>54</sup> Borrowing techniques from Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, Ulinka Rublack advocates multiple readings of texts in order to elicit emotional narratives in Rublack 'Interior States and Sexuality in Early Modern Germany' in Scott Spector, Helmut Puff and Dagmar Herzog (eds) *After The History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault* (Berghahn, 2012), p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

example, remembering when Mark had hesitated about pursuing a degree in dentistry after passing his A-Levels, Alan described how ‘we said, well what else could you go into with what you’ve done?’<sup>57</sup> The sense of familial intimacy was summed up in Mark’s memory of a family holiday, which was peppered by collective pronouns:

*We had holidays down near... we had a couple of holidays, at least one, in Bridport. I remember it was pee-ing with rain, so we had – dad has this stuff – a useful sheet of polythene. So, we were all sitting, backs to the sea-wall with this sheet of polythene draped over us like a tent... [laughs]*<sup>58</sup>

As they huddle together in comic defiance of the rain, the Birchwoods appear as a happy, collective family unit. The anecdote underlines Alan’s practical resourcefulness and leadership on family holidays – distinctly masculine codes of behaviour, which are a discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. It also represents a practical, material representation of masculine protection in a post-war leisure context.<sup>59</sup>

In John Taylor’s descriptions of family holidays, he was more inclined to use ‘I’ and ‘them’ than the Birchwood’s ‘we’, drawing attention to feelings of separation. Again, John’s reflections contrast with those of his father Bill, who used family holidays to further exemplify his family’s closeness: in summary, they were ‘nice times, really good times’.<sup>60</sup> However, after describing two incidents in which he felt scared while stuck on a cliff path, and fell and hurt himself in some sand-dunes, John explained:

*Things that don’t have any trauma attached to them I don’t really remember... I’m sure there were lovely, you know, nice holidays and... I probably, I probably got sat outside a pub occasionally with a bottle of Coke and a pack of crisps like everybody did in those days... and other days I went out with them walking... or... on the beach... or whatever they were doing. Driving around looking at places, probably.*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*, April 2016.

<sup>58</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>59</sup> On the nineteenth century location of masculine protection in the public sphere, see Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p. 86.

<sup>60</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*, October 2015.

<sup>61</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

Further insight into this passage can be gleaned by deploying Simon Schrager's approach to analysing social relationships in oral testimony. Schrager identifies three possible 'aspects of composition': 'the position of the teller vis-à-vis events'; 'similarities and oppositions in different tellers' versions of events'; and 'categories that the teller employs when generalising and individualising events'.<sup>62</sup> Applying these to John's testimony, firstly, we can detect a shift in John's position as 'teller': he moves from *personal* 'traumatic' recollections of cliff paths and sand-dunes, to *imagined* 'nice' memories of pubs, walking and driving around, told from his parents' perspective. Second, there appears to be a potential 'opposition' between John's version and his father's, as Bill fails to recount the particular traumas remembered by his son. Finally, in his description of pubs, Coke, crisps, walks and drives, John employs 'categories' deriving from culturally available scripts of 1960s British family holidays 'in order to generalise an event'. Alert to this use of generalisation, he qualifies it with the word 'probably', which he uses three times. The discrepancies in this passage, illuminated by Schrager's analytic approach, offer insight into John's social relationships within and beyond his family. They also tell us about his negotiations of personal and social memory. John's wish to join an imagined social world of pubs, walks and drives is undermined by his personal 'trauma' memories and the sense of separateness, which is emphasised in his use of pronouns.

Contrastingly, Mark Birchwood's recourse to generalised memories took on forms of happy fantasy. For example, remembering a favourite holiday destination, he commented 'In my mind we went there hundreds of times, to this place, but it probably wasn't more than, like, half a dozen'.<sup>63</sup> At another point in the interview, he remarked on how 'the summers went on forever and all that kind of stuff'.<sup>64</sup> For Mark, insertions of vague, fantastical generalities alongside vivid anecdotes, such as the Bridport sea-wall moment (see above), contributed to his overwhelming sense of childhood contentment. However, John's mundane imaginings of walks, drives and pubs did little to offset his memories of particular traumatic events. By analysing the narrative traits in both accounts, we are able to access rich insight into the respondents' experiences of

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<sup>62</sup> Samuel Schrager, 'What is Social in Oral History?' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge, 1983), p. 285.

<sup>63</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

their social relationships with their parents, and the emotional legacies of these relationships fifty or sixty years later.

## 5. Dialogues: Intersubjective Dialogues

As we have seen, fathers and sons reflected on their emotional lives in ongoing dialogues with their emotional inheritances, with real and imagined social worlds, and with prevailing cultural scripts. They also told their stories in dialogue with the researcher. The interview has been the subject of sustained debate in the historiography on oral history method, particularly around issues of empathy and researcher-subjectivity.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, as Valerie Yow has suggested, 'when we pretend there is nothing going on inside of us that is influencing the research and interpretation, we prevent ourselves from using an essential research tool'.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, oral history has its roots in giving voice to, and building solidarities with, disempowered groups; such motivations were often premised on mutual sympathy between researcher and subject. But as Carrie Hamilton has shown in her discussion of the mixed feelings she felt as a feminist towards female Basque separatists, the relationship between emotional engagement and political solidarity can be complex, leading to moments of tension as well as harmony.<sup>67</sup> Hamilton turned to self-reflection, including techniques of dream analysis, in order to understand the intersubjective dynamics at play in the course of her research. The subjects of my research have not been selected in order to interrogate such highly politicised agendas; however, like Hamilton, I have found certain psychoanalytic concepts useful when reflecting on my subjectivity in relation to my interviewees, particularly with reference to my age, gender, family and class identities. My self-reflection has not extended to dream analysis; however, I have been attentive to the roles of unconscious, as well as conscious, communications in my interviews.

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (1998) 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses' in Perks and Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*; Kathleen M. Blee, 'Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan' in *The Journal of American History*, 80 (1993); Katherine Borland (1991) 'That's not what I said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research' in Perks and Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*; Carrie Hamilton, 'On Being a 'Good' Interviewer: Empathy, Ethics and the Politics of Oral History' in *Oral History*, 36 (2008).

<sup>66</sup> Valerie Yow, '"Do I Like Them too Much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa' in *Oral History Review*, 24 (1997), p. 70.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, *Moving Feelings*.

As Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson have reminded us, the objectives of oral historians and psychotherapists are quite different. Oral historians do not, after all, ask their respondents to recline on couches, free-associate or record their dreams; their interest is in historical research, not therapeutic outcomes.<sup>68</sup> However, as Michael Roper has suggested, the situational similarities between oral history interviews and psychoanalytic therapy sessions demand that we explore the utility of certain Freudian interpretive principles.<sup>69</sup> Like psychoanalysis, oral history takes the form of an open discussion with attentive listening; it also often includes reflections on early family experiences; and in both settings, narrations of 'emotional content' may expose feelings about the past that remain unresolved.<sup>70</sup> Roper's interest in the association of oral history with psychoanalysis follows work by Karl Figlio, which encourages us to see interviews as social relationships.<sup>71</sup> As in any other social relationship, Figlio suggests, oral history interviews are subject to the presence of *transference* and *counter-transference*, in which past experiences of each party are transmitted unconsciously into the conversation.

During the interviews that I conducted with fathers and sons, I found evidence of transference channelled through unconscious associations with my age and family identity. For example, this was the case in my interview with Peter Wilkins, the farmer, who first became a father in the early 1960s. In the course of his narration, he had been clear that as a new parent he did not want to be as controlling as his parents had been:

[My parents] would always try and plan, or suggest what we did, in any situation... and, erm.... they used to have their say, whether it was asked for or not... and, as Roger or Catherine were brought up... I told myself... I wouldn't tell them what to do, but I would encourage them to do well, what they wanted to do themselves... I wouldn't say I resented what my parents were – you want to do this and do the other – but... it's... that sort of thing. And as I became responsible for others growing up, I made the decision that I wouldn't do that.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel and Thompson, *Myths*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Roper, 'Analysing the Analysed: Transference and Counter-Transference in the Oral History Encounter' in *Oral History*, 31 (2003).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>71</sup> Karl Figlio, 'Oral History and the Unconscious' in *History Workshop Journal*, 26 (1988).

<sup>72</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*, November 2016.

My interview with Peter had been slightly stilted, with some abrupt responses and pauses in the conversation's flow. He would also regularly check in with me for reassurances, using phrases such as 'if you follow what I'm saying?' and 'do you understand me?'.<sup>73</sup> Quite late in the interview, he interrupted his own thoughts on being a grandparent to address me again: 'Am I patronising you?'.<sup>74</sup> After assuring him that I did not feel at all patronised, he explained that *he* had felt patronised by his grandparents, and this had led him to make efforts to speak to his own grandchildren 'on the level'.<sup>75</sup> As I listened back, his hesitations appeared to stem from a heightened cautiousness about patronising younger generations. He was transferring experiences of his own grandfatherhood, fatherhood and childhood, into the conversation with me, who, approximately 40 years his junior, might have represented a child or grandchild.

Equally, in the course of listening back to the interviews, I became aware of points at which *my* experiences and relationships entered the conversation unconsciously, as counter-transference. For example, during the conversation about Mark Birchwood's perceived shortcomings at DIY (see above), I noticed my attempt to make light of it and comment on my own deficiencies. In the following excerpt, Mark's laughter had in fact been drowned out by my own: '...[Dad] was having a clear-out of his tools and he said "you don't do so much of the DIY do you?" [pause] I thought I did [laughs]...'.<sup>76</sup> In the same passage of conversation, when Mark drew attention to a bookshelf that he thought did not 'look too hard' to make, I replied 'it does to me!'.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in my interview with Alan, I noticed my silence in response to a joke he made about Mark having not tried hard enough at university, and my tentative responses to his descriptions of Mark's faltering early career. In both instances, I felt an affinity with Mark. On reflection, hearing about his relationship with Alan had aroused unresolved feelings about my relationship with my own father (who died several years ago), which manifested in my losing composure at certain points in both interviews. Such examples illustrate some of the ways in which unconscious communication relating to our own

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

family identities can come to form part of the stories that are remembered and presented to us.

Along with family, gender also informed intersubjective dynamics in my interviews. Literature on interviewing as a gendered process has suggested that men interviewing men creates a competitive dynamic, as each seeks to impose their authority in the conversation.<sup>78</sup> In general, however, the gendering of my interviews has been more benign, with men noticeably concerned with establishing a rapport around traditionally masculine subjects. For example, I had a number of substantive conversations about sport, in which my interest in football and cricket enabled a free-flowing discussion, fostered by a shared understanding. My interest in pop music led to similarly rich testimony. However, discussions of cars, motorbikes and DIY, which often represented significant sites of connection for fathers and sons, were sometimes foreshortened as a result of my ignorance. Moreover, men often reached for subjects that conformed with gender-normative interests, as attractive counterpoints to discussions of parenting and childcare, on which they felt less comfortable.<sup>79</sup> Where men *were* more open about their experiences of parenting, this sometimes coincided with the revelation of my own fatherhood, which served to create a safe space for discussing a subject most men still saw as a primarily a feminine concern. This gendered intersubjectivity was dynamically constituted in the interview; doubtless, it also contributed to the psychic, social and cultural anchor points my subjects drew on when narrating their histories.

On one occasion, gender intersected with class and politics as part of a confrontational encounter, which was more redolent of the masculine competitive dynamic mentioned above. My interview with retired major general Norman Henry and his son Charlie was marked by intermittent changes in mood as my interviewees turned to question me. Where Peter Wilkins (above) had questioned me only for reassurance ('do you understand me?'), the Henrys' enquiries of me, on reflection, had the effect of affirming our different class identities. Some of the references that illuminated this

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<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Yow, *Do I Like Them Too Much?*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Peplar reported similar issues in his oral histories with men about family life. See Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 112-113.

distinction were representative of peculiarly masculine cultures to which I was excluded, such as certain City of London (i.e. the financial district) institutions and officer hierarchies in the army. But arguably, although classed, thwarted discussion of such topics merely corresponded with the sort of foreshortened conversations about motor cars and DIY I had experienced with other respondents. Towards the end of our interview, however, the son, Charlie, directed a question towards me which appeared more provocative:

I mean if you look at the ageing problem in the UK and the pressure on the health service.... If you're in Japan or Taiwan [where the interviewee had spent time], this is up to the family – why should the state be dealing with this? I mean, I don't know if your parents are still alive, but will you look after them or will you just send them off to a state nursing home and the state can look after them?<sup>80</sup>

I was discomforted by the remark and didn't respond. On listening back, I was able to locate my feeling in the context of a broader narrative of intersubjective class difference: such was their wealth, it seemed unlikely they would ever have cause to depend on state care. Charlie's remarks were also consistent with his and his fathers' assertions of a Conservative political worldview, which, as we shall see, they deployed frequently in tandem with their beliefs in the sustenance of class hierarchy. Moreover, their testimony throughout had been characterised by what Mike Savage and Andrew Miles have described as 'gentlemanly motifs' – judicious uses of rhetorical understatement in order to confirm a sense of class distinction – a theme to which we will return in Chapter Two.<sup>81</sup> Charlie's question to me was a more confrontational demonstration of the same instinct.

While, self-evidently, it is not possible to engage in similar processes of self-reflection when dealing with existing testimony, I have identified comparable classed intersubjective encounters between the interviewer and interviewee. In John Lawrence's secondary analysis of Goldthorpe's *Affluent Worker* studies, he argues that male workers were more sensitive to questions of status than the middle-class,

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<sup>80</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*, February 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Miles and Mike Savage, 'The Strange Survival Story of the English Gentleman, 1945–2010' in *Cultural and Social History*, 9 (2012), p. 603.



professional university researchers acknowledged. Lawrence suggests that this oversight led to conclusions that underplayed attitudes of class aspiration.<sup>82</sup> Among some of the 1980s cohort of oral history testimonies, it was possible to detect more explicit cognisance of the researcher-respondent dynamic. Often, families appeared uninhibited about voicing their opinions about social class, politics and intergenerational change. Thompson and his team's questionnaire, while wide-ranging, was designed principally to elicit an understanding of intergenerational social mobility. Questions such as 'Were you encouraged to speak proper English at school?' both marked respondents' native accents as indicators of lower social status, and often confirmed a social division between interviewer and interviewee. In the interview with Midlands-based Alan Sorrell, this division manifested in a particularly confrontational passage:

I speak – you talk nice where you come from and I don't s'pose you – well, put it like this, the area what we're in is what's called the Black Country, the Midlands, it's all – they've always got a slang saying. If I talk quicker and talk in Black Country slang, you wouldn't know what I was on about, you know.<sup>83</sup>

At first, the interviewer seeks to downplay the importance of accents, before self-deprecatingly suggesting that the south lacks the cultural richness of north:

That's just accents and local things. I mean, down our end of the country, there are accents as well, you know, but they're not as pronounced as a northern one. Well, they might be to you, but to us they're not. It depends where you come from. It's quite nice because when you go around, you hear all the different ones. It gets a bit boring down our end when they all talk the same!<sup>84</sup>

Determined to make his point, Alan persists with his commentary of regional difference, suggesting also that southerners are economically privileged:

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<sup>82</sup> Lawrence, *Social-Science Encounters*, p. 215.

<sup>83</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133, Paul Thompson and Howard Newby, (1986) *UK Data Service*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*.

You're the south and we're the north, you know, there's like a... well, there's a gap and there's a helluva' lot of difference. If you're north of London city and north of, say, Watford, you're a northerner. It is – let's say, there's no dividing line, but there is. Everybody is well off with jobs down there 'n' that. There's not many people out of work.<sup>85</sup>

At this point, the interviewer dispenses with her or his attempts to sustain a rapport, and instead confronts Alan directly: 'There are. Don't you believe that there aren't people out of work!'<sup>86</sup> The interview had taken place at a time of record unemployment, when, it has been argued, Conservative policies of deindustrialisation and service sector growth had accentuated feelings of a 'north-south divide' for many communities outside the south-east.<sup>87</sup> Alan's interchange with the interviewer reveals how strongly he felt about his regional identity at a time when the country's divisions along political, economic and geographic lines were heightened. As we will see in Chapter Two, Alan's views on politics were ambivalent; however, he also proudly proclaimed to be 'working-class and I always will be'.<sup>88</sup> His interviewer's loss of composure reflects how class sensitivities were heightened on both sides of the 'north-south' divide, and, as Lawrence found in a different context, alerts us to the way contemporaneous socio-political settings can impact on intersubjective research dialogues.

Across both cohorts, such confrontational exchanges were exceptional. More often, I was struck by my subjects' enjoyment of their interviews. In one of several follow-up emails I received, a son thanked me for a 'joyful and most memorable occasion';<sup>89</sup> in another response, mid-interview, a subject commented 'This is all good stuff!' ... 'I've never spoken... you suddenly start thinking and the words start tumbling out...'<sup>90</sup> Joanna Bornat has written about the therapeutic potential of oral history for older people, who can find in it a welcome counterpoint to feelings of distance and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *The Effects of Thatcherism in the Urban North of England*, <https://www.metropolitiques.eu/The-effects-of-Thatcherism-in-the.html> [Accessed September 2018]

<sup>88</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>89</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>90</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

exclusion from contemporary life.<sup>91</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of the study – and my training – to assess whether this has been the case for my fathers and sons (who ranged in age from late-fifties to mid-nineties), I have had increasing cause to reflect on the *purpose* and effects of my research in this context. At one level the interviews have formed part of an intellectual process with the aim of producing a piece of academic work; but at another, they have been sites of productive reflection for interviewees and interviewer alike.

## Conclusion

The dynamic interaction of the oral history interview, in which memories are recalled and viewpoints shared, provides a vivid illustration of how reflections on the past are negotiated in the present. In this chapter, I have illustrated some of the ways in which such negotiations take place with recourse to material culture and from the vantage points of particular life-stages. By deploying methods of narrative analysis, I have explored the relationships fathers and sons had with each other, with cultural scripts, and with wider social worlds. By using psychoanalytic interpretive strategies, I have illuminated unconscious, intersubjective transmissions, and shown how they can contribute to intellectual conclusions. Binding these findings together has been men's interactions with available modes of masculine identity, which were drawn from culture, but processed subjectively, in formulations profoundly influenced by particular family circumstances. Oral history's retrospectivity enables the continuities of such processes to be assessed across life-courses, against contexts of socio-cultural change. The emotional lives of fathers and sons were bound by history but also inherently unstable and ongoing; their legacies continued to affect thoughts, feelings and actions, as part of emotional histories which remain in motion.

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<sup>91</sup> Joanna Bornat, 'Oral History as a Social Movement: Reminiscence and Older People' in *Oral History*, 17 (1989).

## Chapter Two.

### Normal, Ordinary Family Life

This chapter explores the way men engaged with discourses of normality and ordinariness in the course of narrating their life stories. Despite the profound effects of social mobility and challenges to their understandings of typical gender roles, many fathers clung to the un-remarkableness of their family lives when narrating their life stories. To some extent, sons shared their fathers' outlooks; but their reflections also betrayed the range of new opportunities for self-fulfilment that had allowed their life-courses to unfold more unpredictably. Where fathers were more inclined to stress the universality of their experiences, sons emphasised the particularity of theirs. Drawing on ideas of ordinariness and individuality, which have emerged prominently in revisionist accounts of post-war British history, I suggest how these characteristics can be mapped generationally. I illustrate how working-class and socially mobile fathers' accounts of themselves as ordinary remained bound to their families' legacies of class and political identity, but became more expansive and diffuse over the course of their lives. A generation on, their sons' relationships to these legacies were more removed still. Similar trajectories emerged from middle and upper-middle-class father-son relationships; however, they were framed by continuities of class identity and culture in contrast to the changes experienced lower down the social order. Cutting across boundaries of social class were post-war gender relationships, which remained moored to longstanding conceptions of *normal* family life, but which nonetheless were subject to challenge and revision from the perspectives of middle and old-age. As Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson have recently argued, from the 1970s, people in Britain were increasingly inclined to express their autonomy and self-determination in a range of socio-political contexts.<sup>1</sup> This chapter examines how such expressions were mediated in father-son relationships, across life-courses.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s' in *Twentieth Century British History*, 28 (2017).

## 1. Normality and Ordinarity

In a nuanced analysis of ‘family life and “normality” in post-war British culture’, Pat Thane highlights some of the ambiguities underpinning an era that has been often characterised as ‘traditional’ or as a ‘golden age’.<sup>2</sup> As we have seen, the nuclear family model was the focus for post-war re-construction and stability;<sup>3</sup> but as Thane illustrates, it was in many respects neither traditional nor secure. Two-children families were a departure both from larger Victorian family sizes and smaller inter-war ones; full employment created stable but atypical conditions for male breadwinning; and women’s roles sat precariously amid competing forces of rising participation in the workforce, and pressure to be full-time mothers and homemakers.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the desire to label this state of affairs as ‘normal’ was pressing – both contemporaneously, to mark a removal from the tumult of wartime, and retrospectively, to locate the 1950s in particular as the settled midpoint between 1940s war and austerity, and the cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Official efforts to preserve normal family life only underlined its vulnerability. The National Marriage Guidance Council grew in size and scope after the war and the Charity Organisation Society was renamed as the Family Welfare Association in 1946, reflecting a national concern for families’ wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> The relatively low number of divorces in the 1950s (after a spike in the late 1940s as the disruption of wartime took its toll) suggests that such efforts may have been successful.<sup>7</sup>

However, as Claire Langhamer has argued, beneath the surface lay ‘a mid-twentieth century of quiet emotional instability and subversion of established norms: a story of discontinuity and relative speeds of change’.<sup>8</sup> Deborah Cohen has illuminated

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<sup>2</sup> Thane, *Family Life*.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction, pp. 22-25. See also Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 26-28; Finch and Summerfield, *Companionate Marriage*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> On the competing demands of work and motherhood, see McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*; Wilson, *The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*; Eve Worth, ‘A Tale of Female Liberation? The Long Shadow of De-Professionalization on the Lives of Post-War Women’ in *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, XXIII (2018). I shall return to this subject in Chapter Five.

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion, see Nick Thomas, ‘Will the Real 1950s Please Stand Up?’ in *Cultural and Social History*, 5 (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Teri Chettiar, ‘“More than a Contract”: The Emergence of a State-Supported Marriage Welfare Service and the Politics of Emotional Life in Post-1945 Britain’ in *Journal of British Studies*, 55 (2016); Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp. 202-206; Peplar, *Family Matters*, Chapter Three.

<sup>7</sup> Elliott, *Demographic Trends*, p. 91. The divorce jumped from one to four divorces per 1,000 married persons over the late 1940s, but dropped again to around two in the 1950s.

<sup>8</sup> Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 7.

the post-war tension between people's increasingly private family lives and the growing encouragement from experts to for them to unburden family secrets.<sup>9</sup> Lucy Delap has uncovered disclosures of child sexual abuse in the 1950s and 1960s that was routinely dismissed as evidence of 'normal' childhood sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Instances of sexual and domestic violence were similarly normalised.<sup>11</sup> As we shall see in Chapter Three, fathers and sons alike found psychological and rhetorical strategies with which to manage memories of 'normal' levels of discipline and punishment.<sup>12</sup> Conceptions of post-war family were thus idealised yet betrayed underlying unease. Some of this tension, between the 'normal' lives to which fathers and sons aspired and the more unsettled experiences they documented, were revealed in oral history interviews.

Their narrations can be located against a post-war cultural shift away from emotional restraint and towards individual self-expression.<sup>13</sup> Across the mid-twentieth century, there was a gradual shift: from marriage reformers who had located emotional openness as legacy of the Enlightenment tradition, eschewing religious ideas of traditional spousal roles, towards psychoanalysis, which favoured freedom of expression to combat individual neuroses and obsessional behaviour.<sup>14</sup> Mathew Thomson has traced the shift towards individualised therapeutic strategies in psychology across the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Martin Francis cites two arbiters of change along this trajectory: the move towards expressiveness that accompanied Americanisation and the new-wave movement, and the fashion for 'gestalt therapy' in psychology, in which childishness and spontaneity was encouraged in order to overcome trauma caused by excessive self-discipline.<sup>16</sup> As Laura Tisdall has shown, a greater focus on individuality informed contemporary 'child-centred' psychology. Such thinking respected the differences between a 'normal childhood' and a 'normal adulthood', each of which were considered foundational to a healthy democratic

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen, *Family Secrets*, p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> Lucy Delap, "'Disgusting Details Which Are Best Forgotten': Disclosures of Child Sexual Abuse in Twentieth-Century Britain" in *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> Brooke, *Gender and Working Class* p. 788; Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 106; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951* (OUP, 1998), p. 176; Segal, *Slow Motion*, pp. 13-16.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter Three, pp. 143-152.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, pp. 257-272.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 30; Peplar, *Family Matters*, Chapter Three; See also Wills, *Delinquency*.

<sup>15</sup> On the increasingly individualistic character of popular psychology in the post-war period see Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 266.

<sup>16</sup> Francis, *Tears*, pp. 381-383.

citizenship.<sup>17</sup> Having come of age with a greater repertoire of psychological explanations on which to draw, sons were more likely to critically engage with the emotional health of their upbringings; but, fathers were not beyond similar critical self-reflection. What emerges most prominently, however, is a desire to have participated in a heteronormative nuclear family structure, with little emotional discord and common understandings of normative gender roles. The extent to which such desires were reflected in reality was discussed with the benefit of hindsight offered in the oral history interview. Davis and King argue that post-war 'fatherhood was a convenient way to help men position themselves and be positioned socially within "normal" peacetime family life'.<sup>18</sup> As memories of war became more distant and the more home lives fell under scrutiny, more cracks in the idealised 'normal family life' were revealed.

The terms 'normal' and 'ordinary' cover a multitude of experiences. Sometimes they were used interchangeably; often, similar sentiments might be expressed with phrases such as 'like everybody else', or 'what everybody else was doing'. However, if conceptions of normality tended towards the psychological health and ordering of gender relationships *within* families, ordinariness, broadly conceived, tended towards conceptions of *families' positions in society*. Mike Savage has argued that labourers and middle-class technocrats each made claims on ordinariness: blue-collar workers in order to retain 'badges of respectability' associated with practical skill in the process of deindustrialisation; and managers due to the 'increasing embrace of merit, technique and skill' and the decline of inherited power.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, as Savage outlined in his secondary analysis of Goldthorpe's *Affluent Worker* studies, men were individuals, who were resistant to social classification according to occupational categories. Indeed, he suggests, the 'central claim that respondents sought to elaborate was their ordinariness and individuality'.<sup>20</sup> Ordinariness and individuality have proved to be productive framing devices for people's subjectivities since the late 1960s. Politicians preoccupied with 'ordinary people' or 'ordinary working people' over the late-twentieth century met with a citizenship whose 'ordinariness' encompasses the individual freedom and self-

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<sup>17</sup> Tisdall, *Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood*, pp. 27, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Davis and King, *Gendered Perspectives*, p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p. 235. A detailed discussion on the fetishisation of practical skill at work and at home follows in Chapter Five.

<sup>20</sup> Savage, *Working-Class Identities in the 1960s*, p. 929.

determination to eschew party loyalty.<sup>21</sup> As Claire Langhamer has recently highlighted, discourses of ordinariness in post-war British society exist in constant tension with the agency and *extraordinariness* of people's lives.<sup>22</sup> For these fathers and sons, ideas of ordinariness and individuality denoted markers of intergenerational change.

Most of the sons in this study came of age between the late-1960s and the late-1970s, just as, it has been argued, feelings of autonomy and individuality were beginning to supplant older forms of class identity moored more tightly to political worldviews.<sup>23</sup> At the same time they were negotiating the freighted transition from boyhood to manhood, in dialogue with their fathers' subjective identities. In Savage's account, class continues to matter in the 1960s; it 'sustains individualistic identities', but then 'disrupts' them, so is 'pushed back into the wings'.<sup>24</sup> Jon Lawrence has class more centre stage, suggesting that Goldthorpe's researchers and respondents' shared interests in presenting a common opposition to snobbery, conformism and elitism may have masked keenly felt expressions of class identity on both sides.<sup>25</sup> Analyses of subjective class identities through the 1970s, 80s and 90s have ranged from declinist narratives, to arguments for the continued primacy of class-consciousness, to accounts highlighting a greater degree of ambivalence and ambiguity.<sup>26</sup> Father-son testimonies trace both horizontal and linear trajectories of shifting conceptions of class identity. Horizontal, because, as a cohort, sons of all social classes were less likely to identify as 'ordinary', and more likely to assert their individuality and autonomy, whether through the adoption or rejection of their fathers' class identities and political worldviews. Linear, because while fathers were more inclined to embrace ordinariness, they also documented a change over the courses of their lives, corresponding with socio-cultural shifts, during which their outlooks and class identities became more varied and diffuse over time. For middle and upper-middle-class families, this pattern was modified. As Savage argues, middle-class families shared in the fetishisation of ordinariness to some

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<sup>21</sup> Robinson, et al., *Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s*, p. 273. As the authors note, the popular individualism of the 1970s produced multiple political subjectivities, by no means only moored to the rise of Thatcherite Conservatism. See also, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Discourses of 'Class' in Britain in 'New Times'*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>22</sup> Langhamer, *Who the Hell are Ordinary People?*.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, et al., *Telling Stories about Post-war Britain*, pp. 273, 302.

<sup>24</sup> Savage, *Working-Class Identities in the 1960s*, p. 939.

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence, *Social-Science Encounters*, especially pp. 228, 234.

<sup>26</sup> For more on this discussion, see Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Discourses of 'Class'*.



extent, but as we shall see, they did so in negotiation with sometimes competing impulses of social egalitarianism and philanthropic altruism. For the exceptional upper-middle-class Henrys, ordinariness was something strategically claimed rhetorically, while being roundly rebuffed in terms of attitudes and behaviour.

## 2. Normal Family Life

People in post-war Britain started families for reasons of romantic love, economic pragmatism and a desire to resume a normal state of affairs after war.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the stigma of broken homes, fears of misguided children growing into juvenile delinquents and mistrust of deviations from the heterosexual male breadwinner–female homemaker model all weighed heavily on the nuclear family ideal.<sup>28</sup> As we have seen, such anxieties anticipated the so-called ‘permissive’ legislation of the late 1960s on divorce, contraception, abortion and homosexuality, which were designed as much to fortify the ideal of the family as to cater to its failings.<sup>29</sup> For many of the fathers interviewed, normal family life was as ordinary as it was aspirational. In the course of day-to-day routines, it was a source of reassurance and contentment. As Peter Wilkins replied when asked if they had their meals together as a family, ‘Oh yes, normal, you know, normal family...’.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, normality was considered something to which their sons should aspire. Alan Sorrell summed his mother and father’s hopes for him when he said ‘I suppose all parents are the same. They want you to grow up and be good, get married, have children and not the other way ‘round, and just lead a good, normal life I suppose and get plenty of money, I suppose, that’s what they all want you to do’.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Henry Curd was pleased that his sons had married because, as he explained, he thought marriage to be ‘part of a normal way of life. The only thing what might have upset me, if they had boyfriends, and they went and lived with their boyfriends, that might have upset me a bit. They had a normal way of life, they had

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<sup>27</sup> Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 7; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, King, *Family Men*, pp. 64-68; Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 45-47; Peplar, *Family Matters*, p. 4; Wills, *Delinquency*.

<sup>29</sup> Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 34-38; see also Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (OUP, 1990), pp. 406-408.

<sup>30</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>31</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133. The Sorrells' view on marriage before children remained normative in the late 1950s and early 1960s, even if regular church attendance was beginning to decline. See Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-century Britain* (Pearson Longman, 2006), pp. 25-26.

girlfriends and that sorta' thing'.<sup>32</sup> In all these reflections, normality is fetishized. But they also betray anxieties about the potential for normal family life's transgressions. Peter Wilkins' family life was in fact to end in divorce; Alan Sorrell's parents did not want him to have children *after* marrying; Henry Curd disapproved of homosexuality.

Peter Coverley's mind was more open to the different family structures available to his children's generation, but similarly conscious that they represented a departure from the norm as he understood it.

Well, after Mary died, I was up visiting them and I said to the children "Why don't you get married?" They just said, "What for?" I said "Well, I suppose you've got something there. If you fall out badly, both of you can split up and that's it. There'd be no recriminations". No, I must confess, I take a fairly tolerant view, although from my own point of view, I would marry. Because I had such a happy marriage. It's only occasionally that it suddenly dawns on me that lots of people haven't had. I was lucky.<sup>33</sup>

This passage of Peter's testimony alludes to a peculiarly post-war intergenerational shift in attitudes. One of the older fathers in this study, Peter married in 1944. His evocation of a happy marriage resonates with the mid-century flourishing of romantic love that Claire Langhamer has identified, which coincided with 'new models of selfhood [in private life], which prioritised self-fulfilment over self-control'.<sup>34</sup> But Peter also recognised that quests for self-fulfilment had changed shape for his children's generation. Legislation in 1969 had enabled young people both to decide to get married younger without their parents' consent (at 18 rather than 21) and to divorce more easily, without proof of fault on either side.<sup>35</sup> At the time of Peter's interview in the mid-1980s, cohabitation was also considered less unusual, as the experiences of his children were proving. One of the drivers of normal family life in the 1950s and 1960s had been the desire for a resumption of stability after the war; for the next generation, however, the trappings of such stability could be stifling. Common to both generations, however,

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<sup>32</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042, Thompson and Newby.

<sup>33</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037, Thompson and Newby.

<sup>34</sup> Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 45-47; See also Francis, *Tears*, p. 382.

<sup>35</sup> On the Family Law Reform Act, see Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 175-176. On the Divorce Act, see Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 227.

was a belief that happiness could and should come from within. As Mike Savage described in his reading of the 'ordinary individuals' at the pivot of this intergenerational transition, they were 'people able to live their own lives without any given privilege but making the choice to live life their own way'.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, families were required to deal with deviations from normality in the course of their everyday lives and in the shape of more substantial life-changing events. Such deviations were located in relation to the otherwise normal order of things, which was prized even more greatly as a result. Episodes of childhood illness stuck in sons' memories because of the disruption they caused to normal routines, which were subsequently happily resumed.<sup>37</sup> When, tragically, Alan Birchwood's daughter Polly died aged five of leukaemia, Alan's first response was to think that 'we've got to be as normal as we possibly can'.<sup>38</sup> The pattern of normal family life was in part dependent on the physical and emotional health of family members. In his influential popular parenting advice book, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, Donald Winnicott titled two chapters 'What do we Mean by a Normal Child?' and 'Support for Normal Parents'.<sup>39</sup> In addressing a mainstream audience, his advice was intended for parents and children, whose emotional development, personalities and characters were expected to be normal; *abnormal* cases were for the medical professions to attend to.<sup>40</sup> Like many of the post-war experts, Winnicott channelled a Freudian focus on child development as the incubator of adult psychological wellbeing. Psychoanalysis was only one source of influence in a range of expert advice directed towards families, but it was the most influential.<sup>41</sup> As the sociologists were popularising understandings of families' positions in society, popular psychology was encouraging reflection on selfhood and emotional wellbeing within those families.

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<sup>36</sup> Savage, *Working-Class Identities in the 1960s*, p. 938.

<sup>37</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133. Sidney Sorrell commented of his childhood scarlet fever that it was 'surprising the things that stick out in your mind... I slept with mother for about a week 'cause I used to see these little dwarfs... gnomes and dwarfs dancing across the top of the wardrobe and it'd give me nightmares 'n' that ... I've never seen anything like it in all me life'.

<sup>38</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* (Penguin, 1964), Chapters 19 and 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>41</sup> Peplar, *Family Matters*, Chapter 3; Deborah Thom "'Beating Children is Wrong": Domestic Life, Psychological Thinking and the Permissive Turn' in Delap, Griffin and Wills (eds) *The Politics of Domestic Authority*, p. 269; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 5, 266.

As we have seen, Frank Mort foregrounded his own subjective experience in his account of post-war social change.<sup>42</sup> He described his relationship with his father as an 'emotional longing for the thing that was not but that might have been. It attempts to offer understanding, in place of that which did not happen but that was supposed to have happened according to the dominant ideas about family life in the period.'<sup>43</sup> The same sentiment might be applied to John Taylor, who invoked ideas of post-war normality – and *abnormality* – when reflecting on the psychological health of his relationship with his parents. We saw in Chapter One how John found composure by locating his personal traumatic memories of family holidays alongside happier, but imagined, generalisations drawn from 1960s society and culture. Similarly, he insisted that his childhood had been 'happy' and 'normal', despite revealing more unsettling feelings about a lack of physical intimacy:

I don't think we were a particularly close... er, cuddly close. I don't remember ever being cuddled particularly... I mean I'm sure I was occasionally, but I don't remember anything like that, it wasn't that kind of relationship. Erm... we just... happy, what I would call a happy, normal childhood... or... apart from when they locked me in the cupboard and whipped me! That's not true! Made that bit up! (big laugh)<sup>44</sup>

His invention of a cupboard and whip was necessary to create the impression that his real-life memories of physical isolation were in no way abnormal. His use of humour to help him regain composure after sharing psychologically troubling memories was a feature of his testimony. John's father, Bill, did not share his son's feelings of interpersonal distance. But like John, he was keen to underline the un-exceptionalness of his family life, which were associated with feelings of satisfaction. Bill reflected on his life as 'a bit humdrum I think, nothing exciting happened' and also 'happy', with 'no regrets'.<sup>45</sup> The only time Bill revealed any sense of discomfort in his account of family life was in a passage describing one of his grown-up son's decisions to take voluntary redundancy without a job to go to; it disrupted the natural order of work, marriage and children.

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<sup>42</sup> Introduction, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Mort, *Social and Symbolic*, p. 355.

<sup>44</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

<sup>45</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

Bill and John each fetishised normal, inconspicuous lives. John's appeal to a 'happy, normal' childhood was borne of his disquiet at not having been cuddled; Bill's 'humdrum' life with 'no regrets' confirmed that in his view, little had happened to upset the normal, satisfying procession of family life. In fact, as we shall see, Bill was inclined to underplay the exceptionality of all his sons' lives, including John's, which departed from Bill's sphere of understanding in a number of ways. For example, John was the first of the family to go to grammar school and university, and, as we have seen, took comfort from the fact that he had remained childless. Nonetheless, the invocation of 'normal' helped father and son alike compose accounts of imagined family life which were familiar and insulated from deviations or threats to the status quo.

The status quo was seldom more threatened than when wives and mothers fell ill. Without women to run households, everyday life suffered considerable upheaval.<sup>46</sup> Recollecting the period Elsie was hospitalised, Henry Curd reflected, 'I think when you was in with your kidney; I think was the worst time. You was in hospital quite a long while'.<sup>47</sup> Sons' memories of these times reinforced their impression that everyday home life was dependent on their mothers' ability to perform the role of home-maker. Deviations prompted incidents which stuck in the memory. John Taylor remembered a Christmas when his mother Edith was so ill she cooked the turkey upside down: 'she really wasn't fit and well enough to do it... but it got cooked'.<sup>48</sup> Another year, when Edith was too ill for even improvised food preparation, John was amazed to discover that his father actually could cook after all. In the Sorrell family, Alan remembered that his father would step in if necessary, but only as a last resort:

One of the sisters'd come up and sorta give a helping hand out with the washing up, cleaning or anything like that. Me' sister'd help out as well, you know, but if she was

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<sup>46</sup> None of the fathers interviewed had experienced serious illness themselves. Nonetheless, given the importance of breadwinning to adult male identity, the relationship between illness, masculinity and work is a fascinating area for further enquiry. See, for example, Ronnie Johnson and Arthur Mcivor, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c. 1930-1970s' in *Labour History Review*, 69 (2004); see also Dennis, et al., *Coal*, p. 182.

<sup>47</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>48</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

really ill and there was nobody to do it, dad'd do it, but the sisters – the aunties would always come up and help her, you know, do what they could for her.<sup>49</sup>

The vacuum created by Alan's mother's poor health was filled by other female family members, across generations. Alan would also contribute; as soon as he was old enough to have his own key, he used to 'turn the gases on, [put the] pudding in the oven';<sup>50</sup> but ultimate responsibility was always female-led.

It was male ideas that the home could not do without a woman at its helm that was fueling rising feminist consciousness, which was being channeled by the emerging women's liberation movement.<sup>51</sup> But as King and Davis have argued, the movement had little impact on the everyday lives of most families.<sup>52</sup> Paid women's work was beginning to have an effect on gendered relationships of power in the home, but expectations of women's domestic responsibilities remained.<sup>53</sup> In the most intimate and ethnographic of the 1950s social studies, Elizabeth Bott observed a 'great deal of variation of shared and segregated chores and lives' in which there was nonetheless 'in all families... a basic division of labour, by which the husband was primarily responsible for supporting the family financially and the wife was primarily responsible for housework and childcare'.<sup>54</sup> Her observation resonated with all these father-son experiences across the 1950s, 1960s and beyond. Asked who was responsible for day-to-day household chores and tasks, fathers described how their wives would cook, wash and clean, while they themselves were responsible for household repairs. Sometimes, women would make jams and preserves; occasionally men would make wine and brew beer. Responsibility for the garden was often shared, although as we will see, no less gendered.<sup>55</sup> In short, these father-son narratives concur with revisionist accounts of post-war family life discussed in the Introduction:

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<sup>49</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of feminist consciousness-raising in relation to the perceived patriarchy of heterosexual families, see Cohen, *Family Secrets*, pp. 229-234.

<sup>52</sup> Davis and King, *Gendered Perspectives*, pp. 84-86. On working-class disengagement with feminism, see Robinson, et al., *Telling Stories about Post-war Britain*, p. 294; Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (Sage, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> For discussion on this tension, see McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*; Wilson, *The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*.

<sup>54</sup> Bott, *Family and Social Network*, p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Chapter Five, pp. 197-198.

optimistic suggestions of substantively more equitable divisions of household labour have most likely been overstated.<sup>56</sup>

Within these inequitable divisions of household labour, however, were feelings of mutual acceptance and respect. In his study of mid-1950s Oxford families, John Mogey observed that 'the wife is expected to maintain the house; washing, cleaning, dusting, cooking, shopping, looking after children, pets, and husband are legitimately expected of her'.<sup>57</sup> But the 'looking after' was expected to be reciprocated in kind as men 'looked after' their families by ensuring their financial security and keeping the house in a good state of repair. As one of Mogey's female respondents commented of domestic work, 'It's not a man's place...'.<sup>58</sup> In their study of a Featherstone mining community, Norman Dennis and his colleagues reported moments of hostility and even violence towards wives whose housework and cooking did not meet husbands' expectations, but also mutual understanding and pride in the gendered roles of labour within and outside the home.<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Roberts remarked of post-war Lancashire families, 'men were not always unwilling to do housework; they were not allowed to do it'.<sup>60</sup> Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter posit the idea of 'caring and sharing' to sum up the negotiations mid-twentieth century couples undertook to make a marriage work over the long term, while mutually respecting each other's underlying gendered contributions of breadwinning and homemaking.<sup>61</sup> In some families, a spirit of caring and sharing saw the lines of gendered divisions of labour softened, although the bulk of the work and overall responsibility remained with women.

More democratic forms of familial organisation in and around the home might include children, although, as had been the case before the war, the younger generation's weight of responsibility was often similarly unequally gendered.<sup>62</sup> This was the case with the Coverleys after 1945. It was Andrew's sisters that would help their mother with the cooking, washing and cleaning, while Andrew would join his

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<sup>56</sup> Introduction, pp. 29-34.

<sup>57</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 55.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Dennis, et al., *Coal*, p. 184.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* pp. 196-225.

<sup>62</sup> Todd, *Flappers and Factory Lads*, p. 722.

father, Peter, to do the shopping every Saturday morning.<sup>63</sup> Peter's job was also to carry out repairs and undertake the 'heavy manual' work in the garden, while his wife was 'on flowers and general supervision'.<sup>64</sup> Andrew explained that it was 'all done as a unit. The whole lot moved around together'; however, it was his mother who was 'the great organising factor behind everything that was ever done by the family'.<sup>65</sup>

Andrew's mother did not return to work as a teacher until the children reached secondary-school age. She did not relinquish her domestic responsibilities altogether, but rather supervised a washing rota, in which all family members were required to contribute.<sup>66</sup> There was a similar situation in the Birchwood family. Mark remembered there to be a 'father-breadwinner, mother-staying at home' arrangement; but once the children were old enough, each of them were assigned a day of the week to cook a meal – a principle Mark has carried forward to parenting his own children.<sup>67</sup> Collective approaches to housework were not confined to middle-class families: the working-class Sorrells shared domestic duties when they were first married, while in the Tillett family, it was traditionally the children's job was to wash-up.<sup>68</sup> Even Bill Taylor, a motor mechanic, conceded to changing John's nappies and dressing him for school so that Edith could sleep after her night shift.<sup>69</sup> Such examples show that gender roles flexed, to varying degrees, and partially endorse the views held contemporaneously, that women's work could nurture and strengthen more equitable domestic relationships at home.<sup>70</sup> However, what was considered normal still rested on women fulfilling the role of home-maker in chief.

It was notable that these performances of gender roles tended to remain moored to relationships across life-courses. Bill Taylor joked 'that's what women did in those days, how we kept them down!', but added that women 'used to take control of the household ... still does, don't they! [big laugh]'. His remarks were directed at Edith, who

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<sup>63</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037; SN: 4938-1 Interview 038, Thompson and Newby, (1988) *UK Data Service*.

<sup>64</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*, 26th April 2016

<sup>68</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 132, Thompson and Newby, (1986) *UK Data Service*; SN: 4938-1 Interview 140, *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>70</sup> McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*, p. 51.



was also present in the interview.<sup>71</sup> Bill's use of humour betrayed his discomposure when faced with the inequity of his and Edith's historic and present-day gendered division of domestic labour. Unable to survive on Bill's income, Edith had juggled housework with full-time work as a nurse 1950s; by the 2010s, with Bill and Edith both retired, Edith's domestic role was little altered. Norman Henry showed more awareness of changing cultural norms than Bill, but remained equally trenchant in his own domestic arrangements. He lamented that while historically, women had 'got to be able to cook' if they were to marry; nowadays, 'most of them *can't* cook, not in the same way as my wife does anyway'.<sup>72</sup> Such life-long habits were also transmitted generationally. Such was Fred Avery's fondness for his mother's bacon pudding as a child in the 1940s and 1950s, he still asked his wife to make one for him 'from time to time' in 2016, 'exactly the same as my mum did'.<sup>73</sup> Other men, however, reflected on historic gender norms with more humility. Peter Coverley, whose wife had directed the domestic affairs of their young family in the 1950s and 1960s, was widowed at the time of his interview. Commenting on his new home life, he reflected:

If it's something onerous, that's the only time I get bored, when I'm doing dusting and Hoovering and things. So did my wife, she didn't care very much for housework. She did it, but it wouldn't have broken her heart if she never had to do any. Like most women, I think. It's men who think women are enjoying themselves, until they land themselves in a position like me, you see, and then they realise what a backbreaking business it is.<sup>74</sup>

We saw at the beginning of this section the way Peter Coverley had gradually come to terms with the changed socio-cultural climate, in which his children had felt more comfortable cohabiting than marrying. He also modified his feelings about the gendering of household chores, but only having become a widower. Speaking from the perspectives of old age, fathers acknowledged that patterns of normal family life had changed for younger generations, and they negotiated those changes with varying degrees of discomfort, nostalgia and reappraisal in interviews. However, that it took Peter's bereavement to instil a change in attitude and behaviour underlines the

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<sup>71</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>72</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry* (my emphasis).

<sup>73</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>74</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037; SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

tendency for gendered conjugal roles, once established, to continue for as long as the relationships they occupied.

### **3. Ordinariness, Individuality, Party Politics and Class**

Across both interview cohorts, father-son relationships were described with recourse to patterns of continuity and change in their families' place in society over time. Taken as a whole, their narrations of social class appear ambivalent and ambiguous, characterized more by heterogeneity than any prevailing attachment to a particular class identity.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps this is to be expected given the relatively small sample size; however, it also reflects the complex interactions of social status and subjective experience over the course of these men's living memories. Examining the relationship between class, subjectivity and intergenerational dynamics between these fathers and sons, it emerges that while both generations can be seen to identify as what Savage termed 'ordinary individuals', within this group there were greater claims to ordinariness among fathers, who also remained in more visible negotiations with their class origins. Sons' subjectivities meanwhile, were in general more individualistic and oriented towards self-fulfilment, reflecting the greater educational, economic, work and socio-cultural opportunities that had been available to them.<sup>76</sup> Reinforcing this sense of autonomy on behalf of the younger generation were firmly held political beliefs, whether in agreement or disagreement with fathers. For their part, fathers' views in later life can be seen to have become less clearly identifiable, in accordance with the shift away 'class voting' from the 1970s.<sup>77</sup> As we saw in Chapter One, intergenerational negotiations of political subjectivities were more pronounced in the 1980s sample.<sup>78</sup>

Invocations of ordinariness illuminated by secondary analysis of Goldthorpe's affluent workers bear relation to erstwhile notions of working-class respectability described in earlier studies.<sup>79</sup> Leo Kuper found that working-class Coventry families

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<sup>75</sup> Sutcliffe-Braithwaite also makes this observation of the Paul Thompson cohort's reflections of 1980s class identities in Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Discourses of 'Class'*, pp. 302-303.

<sup>76</sup> Savage, *Working-Class Identities in the 1960s*, p. 938.

<sup>77</sup> Robinson, et al., *Telling Stories about Post-war Britain*, p. 273.

<sup>78</sup> *Chapter One. Emotional Histories*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>79</sup> On the historic origins of working-class respectability, see Peter Bailey, "'Will The Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?' Towards A Role Analysis Of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability' in *Journal of*

distinguished between children were ‘dragged up’ and those who were ‘brought up’.<sup>80</sup> In John Mogey’s study of 1950s Oxford, in which he compared the new town of Barton with the older and poorer urban setting of St Ebbe’s, he offered the categories of ‘status-assenters’ and ‘status-dissenters’ to distinguish different working-class groups. Within St Ebbe’s, the assenters accepted their social place with little consciousness of its position relative to wider society or aspiration to change it; whereas, the dissenters were more aware of social structure and exhibited greater desire to improve their conditions.<sup>81</sup> Mapped to these sensibilities were longstanding conceptions among the dissenters of working-class respectability and non-respectability. Removed from older and poorer working-class neighbourhoods, Goldthorpe’s affluent workers were less inclined to make these distinctions. Goldthorpe also disputed any implication in the Mogey study that dissenters’ desires to improve their material conditions was coterminous with the coveting of status enhancement.<sup>82</sup>

What fathers and sons in oral history interviews presented as assertions of *ordinariness* – in terms belonging to a majority in society that refuted class distinction – often had its roots in the fetishisation of working-class respectability, which was defined against an unrespectable other. In a long list of characteristics belonging to categories of ‘respectable’ and ‘non-respectable’, Mogey includes, for example, among the respectable working-class, ‘taking good care of children’, ‘providing toys’ and ‘supplying pocket money’; and among the non-respectable, questionable parentage of children, allowing them to play in the street, and marrying ‘above or beneath’ you.<sup>83</sup> It is these sorts of distinction – with ‘rough’ often the vernacular short-hand for ‘non-respectable’ – that framed many sons’ impressions of their parents’ social ordering of neighbourhood life when they were children. As Jon Lawrence notes, Mogey’s study belonged to an early phase of post-war social research, whose respondents were mostly women, interviewed in homes.<sup>84</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that sons used

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*Social History*, 12 (1979); Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, p. 6; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, Chapter Six; Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, Chapter Three.

<sup>80</sup> Leo Kuper, *Living in Towns: Selected Research Papers in Urban Sociology of the Faculty of Commerce and Social Science, University of Birmingham* (Cresset, 1953).

<sup>81</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, especially p. 156.

<sup>82</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, p. 116.

<sup>83</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 143.

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence, *Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain*, p. 285.

discourses of respectability to remember their time as children, under maternal supervision. These early absorptions of social distinctions provided the foundations for their subsequent negotiations of familial aspiration and social change. With the perspective provided by age and education, they were thus able to locate their childhood families' social circumstances with greater clarity, and in relation to their present-day adult lives.

Martin Curd was clear that he had moved up the social hierarchy over the course of his life. When he was a boy, there were children he was forbidden from playing with, who were 'a rough lot ... they always got into fights and they used to walk around with knives'.<sup>85</sup> Likewise at school, 'there was a few there used to sort of keep taking it out on people... but they're the ones who came out worst in the end 'cause they used to play around so much they didn't get on at all'.<sup>86</sup> 'Getting on' was the popular colloquial expression for self-improvement, which peppered contemporary social studies and reflected the increasing opportunities available for many post-war families for social and economic advancement. Martin explained it generational terms:

Well, improve meself. [My parents] got to a certain standard, but they couldn't afford anymore. OK, they can now, they're a little bit better off than they used to be. But they hoped that I would be able to afford a few more things than they could. Which is what you do. What they used to think were extra luxuries – like an automatic washing machine, colour television – they used to have the old black and white. We take 'em as normal things, but they used to think of 'em as luxuries. So really, we are better off than they were.<sup>87</sup>

For Martin, participation in this shift towards the new 'normal' was incumbent upon class mobility. He identified as 'middle-class' in his interview, but remembered in childhood 'we were always sort of the lower ones, we were the working class'.<sup>88</sup> He could also pinpoint the life-stage at which the transition got underway. At technical

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<sup>85</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043, Paul Thompson and Howard Newby, (1988) *UK Data Service*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

college, he had seen 'all different people who've got all different jobs, you talk about different things'.<sup>89</sup> He became interested in...

...getting more money so you can get the better things in life. So you're not working in a factory. Working in a job where you're maybe wearing a suit. As it used to be then. If you had a job with a suit, then you were a bit better than the chap working in a factory with a cloth cap.<sup>90</sup>

This new way of thinking was a marked departure from his childhood beliefs, in which the most salient social distinction was between rough and respectable categories of working-class people. Furthermore, as we will see in Chapter Four, such was Martin's devotion to his father, who was a pattern maker, he had deliberately underperformed in his 11-plus in the hope of succeeding him as a skilled labourer.

Martin's testimony offers an intergenerational framing of the account of 1950s and 1960s social change presented by sociologists such as Ferdynand Zweig, who argued that 'working-class life finds itself on the move towards new middle-class values and middle-class existence... the change can only be described as a deep transformation of values, as the development of new ways of thinking and feeling, a new ethos, new aspirations and cravings'.<sup>91</sup> It also highlights how a father or son's relationship to his work was an unshakeable aspect of his subjectivity and a measure of his male, filial relationships. In 1960, Peter Wilmott and Michael Young argued that occupational mobility affected social relations between fathers and sons more than mothers and daughters, because of the discomfiting effects of different job statuses across generations.<sup>92</sup> Their accompanying assumption that 'daughter' merely 'follows mother in her main occupations of child-rearing and housekeeping' underestimated women's agency in their negotiations of social change, as we shall see.<sup>93</sup> However, as the Curds' evidence attests, their emphasis on work as being central to men's conceptions of their places in society, and, therefore, the potential consequences for intergenerational difference around this time, were well founded.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Brooke, *Gender and Working Class* p. 773.

<sup>92</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Once children had come of age, it was often the case that intergenerational tensions found their voice in differences of political outlook. By the time he had become a more socially aware adult, Martin Curd's childhood devotion to his father had given way to more qualified respect and some conflict:

'Cause like with dad, there's one thing he did talk about, there was sort of them and us. There's them who've got all the money, and there's us poor beggars, as he called it then, who hadn't got any money, who'd got to struggle for everything. It should be spread out a lot more. But if somebody's gonna' work for it, why shouldn't they have the benefit of it?<sup>94</sup>

Martin's parents, Henry and Elsie, may have sought to distinguish themselves from 'rough' families during Martin's childhood, but the more fundamental social divide was between 'us' and the more privileged 'them'. Martin's way out of this unsatisfactory state of affairs had been through social mobility, which coincided with his switch from voting Labour, as his father did, to voting Conservative. He explained that 'with Labour it seemed to me that everybody's gotta have exactly the same. In a way, it's a bit like the Communists – everybody is supposed to have exactly the same, it's gotta be spread equally. You're not allowed to really get on'.<sup>95</sup> Henry, a longstanding trade unionist and son of a local Labour ward secretary, despaired of his son's outlook. Like Martin though, he associated it with his broadened horizons as he came of age, which had impacted upon their respective experiences of social relations at work:

The only way I can explain it, is that [Martin] don't think. That anybody who's got a ha'pence of sense can figure that the situation that's in this country now, its gonna' get nowhere, it's gonna' get worse, unless you get some type of socialism... Maybe because when he went to the grammar school or technical college, he's been with a different type of people to what I was with when I was at work.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.; David Butler and Richard Rose, *The British Election of 1959* (MacMillan, 1970), p. 15. Martin's worldview resonates with Butler and Rose's analysis of late 1950s working-class Conservatives, who were culturally working class but enjoying the material benefits of rising affluence.

<sup>96</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

Martin admitted that he and his father now have 'a few little heated discussions'.<sup>97</sup> But tellingly, Henry admitted 'I'm not such a socialist as I used to be'.<sup>98</sup> Although trenchantly opposed to his son's Toryism, he had softened his position on class-struggle. Instead, he adopted an ecumenical view of class identity which, as other testimonies corroborated, was beginning to reshape older forms of class-consciousness: 'I say yes, I belong to the working class, because everybody must... even a judge is working class, he works, so.... but some people say working class stops at the navy type, and above that are not working class, but I think anybody who works for a living is a working-class type'.<sup>99</sup> Over the course of his life, his sense of belonging to a collective 'us' who were opposed to an elitist 'them' had been transposed into a universal expression of social identity. The assertion that 'everybody must' resonates with conceptions of ordinariness, and with right-wing 1980s political discourse which sought to supplant ideas of class division with the impression of universally shared understandings of working in order to improve standards of living.<sup>100</sup> Henry's adoption of a Conservative rhetorical 'decline of class' narrative places him in a conflicted position in relation to his son, about whose Toryism he despairs. As Sutcliffe-Braithwaite argues, however, such positions reflected the complexities and contradictions of popular attitudes to class in the 1980s.<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps uncomfortable with his new open-ended, amorphous account of class identity, Henry was quick to shift gear and reach for a more tangible representation of what class meant to him:

See, one way of class is when you make something, you make something cheap and nasty, or you make something that's worthwhile having, take them tables - mass produced, cheap stuff. Now, that thing there, I made me self, every bit, and between the two of them, that's class. I'm not saying that's super class, but that's a better class than that is. Because that's all handmade, and that was mass-produced.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Discourses of 'Class'*, p. 295. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite quotes Margaret Thatcher, who in 1988 claimed that 'In the world in which we now live, divisions into class are outmoded and meaningless. We are all working people who basically want the same things. We all share the desire for higher standards of living, of health, of education, of leisure'.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>102</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

It was Savage's view that Goldthorpe's respondents no longer thought of class in terms of occupational groups; rather as performing 'other features in their thinking' surrounding ideas of 'individuality and authenticity'.<sup>103</sup> Henry's remark neatly reflects this shift. The individuality he prized was removed from the sort that his son Martin had endorsed on his journey through the expansive opportunities of technical college, 'getting on' at work, and improved material conditions. Rather, it reflected the authenticity of craftsmanship in material culture, which, as we shall see in Chapter Five, resonated with older forms of working-class work identities. Henry's invocation of 'class' in this context betrayed an aesthetic appreciation of the hand-made table compared with its mass-produced equivalent; but it also symbolised something greater – a connection to a place and time when he had been intimately bound to the fruits of his labour.

Like the Curds, who had forbidden Martin from playing with certain children in the neighbourhood, the Tilletts also drew on discourses of respectability when overseeing their children's friendships. Remembering how Harry's wife would try to prevent their daughter playing with a particular girl in the neighbourhood, they reflected:

*Wife:* I didn't like her playing with that bloody...

*Harry:* I know you didn't.

*Interviewer:* Why?

*Harry:* I didn't like her. It weren't the child. It were the child's family. They were – oh, I don't know. Mother weren't married, was she? And living with their Gran. They didn't know who the bloody father was. She'd got a little girl. She'd got a brother and they didn't know who his father was – well, the brother was – his uncle was in bloody jail and another sister was on the game and – ooh, it was a right bloody family.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Savage, *Working-Class Identities in the 1960s*, p. 937.

<sup>104</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.



Asked if his own family were members of the working class, Harry replied 'yes, certainly.'<sup>105</sup> Harry was a foreman in a timber yard; his father had been a miner. Like Henry Curd though, he had revised his ideas over the course of his life. Reflecting on contemporary society in the mid-1980s, he explained that he '[doesn't] reckon there is a class. Everybody has to work for a living', with the only 'bloody difference' being that some 'have a bit more money than others'.<sup>106</sup> Henry had been 'brought up Labour and always will be';<sup>107</sup> but later in the interview, he appeared more despondent – he was 'anti-Conservative, anti-Maggie Thatcher' but '[doesn't] support anybody because none of them are any bloody good'.<sup>108</sup> Harry's present-day disillusionment, which was evolved from a older world-view where the relation between class and party politics was clear, reflected a present-day lack of deference to political choices. As Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has argued, such attitudes were fundamental to people's claims on ordinariness across the late twentieth century.<sup>109</sup>

Harry's son Steve was both less dogmatic politically and more positive about the social changes that had taken place since he was a child. He believed the social 'gap' to be widening under Margaret Thatcher, but now thought wealthy people were no 'better' than he was.

When I was a kid, it was like it is now, there were the sort of we at the bottom, as it were, working-class – the downtrodden, oppressed masses. You know, the top ones were the upper class, or what we used to call them. I don't believe that now. I mean, they may have more money than I have, but they're certainly no better than we are. And it was pretty obvious where I came on that scale.<sup>110</sup>

As it was for Martin Curd, Steve's childhood conception of belonging lower down the social order was inflected with his parents' political outlook. It was also indelibly associated with male work. Asked what social class he was as a child, he replied 'Working class, I knew that. You know, the sort of thing that is told to you that your

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Decline of Deference*.

<sup>110</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 141, Thompson and Newby (1988) *UK Data Service*.

grandfather worked down the pits, you know, and your dad worked all his life and you'll probably work all your life... little did they know!' <sup>111</sup> His final remark alluded to his present on-off approach to employment, which as we shall see, caused him to feel guilty due to his family's legacy of hard work. <sup>112</sup> Similarly, he had departed from his father's politics:

I was brought up... me dad would say "well, I've always voted Labour, so I'm going to vote Labour". I think I was influenced to do the same, or perhaps not consciously, but the very fact that I knew that was the case with my dad and his dad, I would sort of follow suit until I started to suss out what was going on. Think for myself, you know. <sup>113</sup>

In this respect, his independent political subjectivity upon coming of age also resonates with Martin Curd's narrative. Unlike Martin, however, who grew up to define as middle-class, Steve had remained secured to his class childhood identity: 'I mean, I could win the Pools tomorrow and win a million pounds, but it still wouldn't make me... wouldn't stop me being working-class'. <sup>114</sup>

Steve was not alone in invoking an imagined windfall to assert his working-class credentials. Alan Sorrell had similar feelings, declaring that 'if I was a millionaire I'd still class meself working class. I don't wanna' be an upper-class snob'. <sup>115</sup> Steve's mother had like-minded thoughts, though they were tinged with self-doubt. She admitted that winning the Pools would change her life, but not her working-class identity – 'not the way I speak... I'd let meself down!'. <sup>116</sup> Their interlocutors had not asked any questions about winning lots of money; however, the *extraordinariness* of such an event was commonly evoked as a counterpoint to the *ordinary* state of affairs, in which money was not so plentiful, and from which erstwhile class identity could not be shifted, no matter the circumstances. Richard Hoggart thought occasional gambling among the working-classes to be a longstanding expression of belief in luck and fate. It was 'a reaction from having to 'put up with things', from the realisation that no gradual effort at change is

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Chapter Five, p. 217.

<sup>113</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 141.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>116</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

likely to affect much, from the wish for sudden riches, for freedom from a dull job, for something out of nothing'.<sup>117</sup> The 'pools', shorthand for the 'football pools', was a betting pool in which large sums of money were offered in return for the unlikely correct predictions of weekly football scores. Over the post-war period it was a popular working-class pastime, and took on mythical status as a symbol of fantasy wish-fulfilment. In her survey of twentieth century working-class lives, Selina Todd uses the story of Viv Nicholson, whose husband's record Pools win in 1961 transformed her life but not her class identity, to challenge pre-conceptions about post-war working-class status aspiration.<sup>118</sup> Like Viv, Steve's mother's feelings about her classed self were fixed, as were Steve's, Alan Sorrell's and others. Their use of fantasy wish fulfilment to articulate their determination to never depart from their ordinary working-class identities borrows from a longstanding working-class tradition, demonstrating the tendency among both generations, even by the 1980s, to draw on older working-class cultural scripts. However, for Steve, who felt guilty about shunning work as an adult having grown up with hardworking parents, the confidence with which he nonetheless asserted his working-class identity – 'it wouldn't stop me' – is indicative of a wider strength of feeling of self-assertiveness and confidence among his generation.

As we saw earlier, John Taylor chose to remember his childhood as 'normal', despite revealing seemingly exceptional feelings about a lack of physical intimacy. He also described growing up as 'typical' and 'a bit dull'.<sup>119</sup> Such un-remarkableness was classed. He remembered being part of a community in which 'everybody knew that some people ... doctors, lawyers ... well you'd definitely think they're different'.<sup>120</sup> He did not think of it in such terms when he was a boy, but looking back he 'would definitely say we were a working-class family'.<sup>121</sup> As we shall see in Chapter Five, despite having a distant relationship with his father, who was a mechanic, he believed there to be 'dignity in labour'.<sup>122</sup> The association of class identity and occupation remained strong for John, who described his career in IT as 'a kind of new working-

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<sup>117</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (Penguin, 1957/2009), pp. 117-118.

<sup>118</sup> Todd, *The People*, throughout, especially pp. 8-9.

<sup>119</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

class' job, 'except working-class people now call themselves middle-class because they don't get their hands dirty so much'.<sup>123</sup> His attachment to class identity was weaker than that expressed in other working-class testimonies, but he shared with others an awareness that he now occupies a different classed subjectivity to his father. However, he did inherit Bill's politics. He explained, 'I lived through the Harold Wilson years so, you know, from '63 to whenever it was, 1970... and they couldn't stand Harold Wilson... and that definitely imprinted on me because it, I've always... made me a Conservative'.<sup>124</sup> Corroborating John's account, Bill proudly confirmed that 'all my sons are Conservative'.<sup>125</sup>

For Bill Taylor, buying his own home had been a 'big turning point in our lives', the opportunity for which he attributed to Conservative housing policy in the late 1950s.<sup>126</sup> Bill's working-class Conservatism chimes with the attitudes of a growing segment of 1950s workers identified by Zweig, for whom property ownership gave strength and self-confidence.<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, as we have seen, Bill summed up his life as no more than 'humdrum'.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, as we have seen in other families, Bill's general outlook owed more to an older tradition of working-class belief in luck and fate. After joking that his only regret was not having married a 'millionairess', he explained, 'but yeah, as I said before, I think life is planned out for you. You might try to alter it, but...'.<sup>129</sup> The belief that 'tomorrow will take of itself' was a classic working-class strategy for dealing with the precariousness of everyday life.<sup>130</sup> Where others had located similar attitudes alongside a 'them and us' politics which saw Labour as the party of the working class, however, Bill saw fate as entirely compatible with working-class Conservatism. Even his socially mobile sons' successes at school, university and in their careers could not shift Bill's insistence that life is simply 'planned out for you'.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, pp. 124-125. Nonetheless, Zweig characteristically overstates the prevalence of these attitudes in the late 1950s, conceding that a majority of workers still harboured suspicions of home-ownership. See also SN: 4938-1 Interview 140; finally buying his council house in the 1980s, Harry Tillett commented that he was uncomfortable that they were now 'capitalists'.

<sup>128</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Hoggart, *Uses*, p. 114. The association of working-class culture with a belief in fate dates back to Henry Mayhew. See Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (CUP, 1983), p. 235.

John's own fatalistic outlook was much less cheerful. He reflected that his life was 'probably neutral', 'it just went by... the decades have just gone by... it's just one damn thing after another and then it comes to an end.'<sup>131</sup> However, despite John's gloomy outlook, his achievements point to the improved opportunities for progression among his generation, about which neither he nor his father gave due credit.

In each of these father-son relationships, shifting conceptions of class identity, social change and political worldview collide in complex and sometimes contradictory intersubjective relational dynamics. The greater choices available to the younger generation emerge in narratives of individuality and self-fulfilment, although they were negotiated with varying degrees of confidence and composure. Fathers were more likely to draw on ideas of ordinariness and universality when reflecting on their personal and familial identity in relation to society. All moor their social identities to their relationships with work; even as the traditionally classed categories of blue- and white-collar jobs became more fluid. As breadwinners succeeding breadwinners, interconnected narratives of class, work and social change were central to fathers and sons' relationships with each other, as well as with the wider social worlds.

#### **4. Fathers, Mothers and Social Mobility**

Fathers and sons' passages through social change were also shaped by the nature and quality of spousal relationships. Fred and Phil Avery's father shared elements of Bill Taylor's attitudes. He voted Conservative, and as Fred remembers, 'even though he was a bricklayer, a tradesman', he was 'a little bit capitalistic'.<sup>132</sup> In fact, his trade was entirely commensurate with his appetite for advancement; he desired not only home-ownership, but also ownership of multiple properties in order to monetise them as investments. Post-war conditions enabled his endeavours, particularly the building opportunities created by the establishment of nearby Crawley new town.<sup>133</sup> However, at first, Jack Avery's ambitions came at the expense, rather than to the benefit, of his

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<sup>131</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

<sup>132</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery* 14th April 2016

<sup>133</sup> Crawley was among the 'first generation' of London's new towns, with building commencing in the late 1940s. See *Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence 2002*, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmtlgr/603/603ap23.htm>

family's happiness and security. While, as we have seen, Fred and Phil's reverence for their father ran like a thread throughout their testimony, there was also a barely concealed subtext, which documented the strain he put on their family as a result of misguided property investments. First, while their mother was in hospital for six months with a post-natal breast abscess, Jack borrowed £400 to build a house in Worthing, for which it soon transpired he was unable to afford the 'outgoings'. Phil remembered, 'that £400 hung like a millstone round his neck for most of our childhood, servicing this £400'.<sup>134</sup> They moved to a pub in Brighton, which had a market license that stipulated opening at 6am each morning to serve the early morning market traders. Fred remembers his mother's stories about their brief time there: 'the... swearing and the spitting and the general, you know... [Phil laughs] clientele of the pub at the time, was horrific, you know ... to bring up a young baby in those sorts of circumstances it just wasn't on'.<sup>135</sup> Fred went on:

Dad had to look around for another property again, so he looked in Burgess Hill again. And lo and behold there was an advert for two, well.... Mum said, aw.... two terrible properties these things, you know. And somebody else said – I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole – was his terms, and you know, for God's sake don't buy those cottages, they're so run down and you know ready to tumble down any minute type of thing, and erm, anyway he did, he went ahead, because it was the only thing he could afford, and actually, he'd bought two properties, and ... we lived in the front one.<sup>136</sup>

Their new home was gloomy and dilapidated, painted black and dark green, with no kitchen, bathroom, and only a brick-floored scullery for cooking and washing. The neighbouring cottage had a sitting tenant, whose rent 'wouldn't cover the cost of repairing a tap washer'.<sup>137</sup> Their mother was 'heartbroken', particularly having had her hopes raised by their brief spell in the new house at Worthing. It was not until many years later that Jack replaced the old stone sink and installed a kitchen cabinet with a pull-down flap that functioned as a worktop. Fred recalled: 'I remember mum saying – do you know? – she said – It's the first time I've ever had a worktop to make pastry

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<sup>134</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery* 14th April 2016

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

on'.<sup>138</sup> We will see below just how important Fred and Phil Avery considered the traditional male breadwinner–female homemaker dynamic to be to the harmony and stability of their childhood lives; however, for long periods, their mother's ability to fulfil her role in the family's gender order was severely compromised by her husband's particularly reckless brand of masculine acquisitiveness.

In Goldthorpe's critique of *embourgeoisement*, he argued that 'normative convergence' of class cultures has a twin focus: 'instrumental collectivism' and 'family-centredness'.<sup>139</sup> Men's experience comprised the 'acceptance of trade union action as a means of economic protection and advancement' and the 'acceptance of the individual, conjugal family and fortunes as a central life interest'.<sup>140</sup> Jack's experience sits uneasily in Goldthorpe's framing. In accordance with the *embourgeoisement* critique, he was not concerned with status enhancement. He retained his worker identity as a builder, there was no sense of his seeking to penetrate middle-class social circles or associations. As we shall see in Chapter Four, his interest in his sons' schooling was not preoccupied with the opportunity for social ascent provided by the 11-plus. However, his commitment to advancement and not settling for present circumstances owed little to instrumental collectivism.<sup>141</sup> Nor was his motivation for accumulating money the comfort and security of his home and family. In many respects, quite the reverse was true; his high-risk brand of masculine provision created extremely testing circumstances for his wife and children. His individualism was personal, not familial. It was not until the children had grown up that he finally paid off the £400. Shortly afterwards, Jack's wife and children were finally to feel the benefit of his entrepreneurial exploits when he formed a profitable property investment company, naming them as shareholders (by this time Fred had become a young quantity surveyor, able to contribute actively to his father's business decisions).

Despite the destabilising effects of his father's excursions into property investment, Fred insisted that their lives had been 'mundane'. Sixty years on, he and his

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, p. 27.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> For a contemporary comparison of typical working-class and middle-class 'perspectives', see Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp. 118-121.

brother Phil were able to account for their father's actions magnanimously. Describing the Worthing misadventure, Fred surmised, 'he'd built himself above his station – fair enough, at least he recognised that and did something about it'.<sup>142</sup> The brothers' happy memories of childhood play were located in outdoor landscapes, rather than inside the home. Conditions for their mother, however, who was bringing up two small children with no kitchen or bathroom, would have been extremely trying; particularly after she herself went back to work to supplement the family's precarious income. Fred and Phil's generous appraisal of their father's travails shows how the process of intergenerational transmission involves rejection as well as assimilation of parents' attributes; they revered their father's physical labour and work ethic, but chose not to adopt his risky entrepreneurial tendencies. It also shows the way interviewees seek to frame their stories as unexceptional, even when the events they describe suggest considerable upheaval. Moreover, the Averys illustrate one way in which conditions of post-war economic and social reconstruction, when combined with masculine business-oriented acquisitiveness could unsettle, as well as reinforce, the normal gender order in families.

As we have seen, many oral history respondents had settled upon an expansive definition of working-class identity in which to locate their social selves; Peter Wilkins was no exception. He asked, rhetorically, 'well... aren't we all working-class? Even well-off people work jolly hard sometimes.'<sup>143</sup> He even remembered being 'irritated' that his son Roger was taught Social Studies at school because of the implications the subject carried of social stratification. Peter saw his views as commensurate with his 'middle-of-the-road' politics, which had seen him vote for all three main parties over the course of his life.<sup>144</sup> It transpired, however, that his repudiation of social hierarchy also resonated with a particularly troubled stage of his personal life. Peter had met his wife Kathleen through the church. The local vicar's daughter, she had grown up in a middle-class household, while Peter was the son of practicing Anglicans, whose farming way of life belonged to the declining agricultural working class. After a few years of married life, and having had two children, Kathleen had become unhappy, as Peter explained:

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<sup>142</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>143</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. Voting promiscuity was not unusual from the 1970s. See Robinson, et al., *Telling Stories about Post-war Britain*, p. 273.



I'm not quite sure how... but when they were seven and nine my wife became quite dissatisfied with what she'd got. I'm not quite sure, how it... well she had a number of friends who were quite a bit better off than we were... you know... we had a few friends who were quite well off. And I think she became dissatisfied. Things deteriorated then. I'm not quite sure why, because up until that time she was quite happy.<sup>145</sup>

The Wilkins' divorce was likely to have been one of the first granted after the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, which, as we have seen, allowed separations to be ratified without proof of fault on either side.<sup>146</sup> Without Kathleen's testimony, we cannot be certain that her reasons for ending the marriage concerned frustrations around loss of class status, but Roger's account appears to support his father's reflections. Asked whether he thought his mother and father would have described themselves as belonging to a particular social class, Roger replied that his father probably would not, but his mother probably would:

*Roger:* I think she'd say middle-class. Upper-middle-class. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Why do you think she felt that was important?

*Roger:* Well, I think that's more to do with her upbringing... When she was younger, obviously my granddad was the vicar of [the village], so... was quite well respected, well know. They lived in... a big place. So... I think they had servants, this kind of stuff.<sup>147</sup>

Even if she had married into the same social class, after the war she would have been unlikely to have had live-in domestic servants as her mother had. But as Lucy Delap had illustrated, practices of and aspirations towards domestic service continued in the post-war period, albeit in different forms.<sup>148</sup> Roger remembered his maternal grandmother, with whom he lived after Kathleen had left Peter, having a regular cleaner and gardener. Certainly, it remained Peter's and Roger's impression that Kathleen was irretrievably bound to a classed understanding of social status.

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<sup>145</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>146</sup> See Cohen, *Family Secrets*, p. 227.

<sup>147</sup> ELL07, *Roger Wilkins*.

<sup>148</sup> Lucy Delap, *Knowing their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-century Britain* (OUP, 2011), p. 133.

As Langhamer has observed, mid-century romantic suitability rested on commonalities of interests, education, accent, outlook, taste and so on; these were codified ways of talking about class, which were often more important to women than men.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, as Annemette Sorensen has highlighted, there are plainly shortcomings in approaches that use only men's occupations to determine the social statuses of whole families in post-war Britain, in which women's employment, material conditions and interests are made invisible.<sup>150</sup> The Wilkins' story illustrates how intersubjective feelings towards class within spousal relationships, compounded by changes to the divorce law, created heterogeneous experiences in families, which traditional categorisations of social class fail to adequately address.

The experience of the divorce for father and son, however, quickly moved beyond conflicting conceptions of class status and towards the redrawing of the family's new more complex social geographies. Upon marrying, Peter had moved from his parents' farm some distance from their rural Fenland village. When he and Kathleen separated, he moved back to his parents' farm, which he had taken over; and his parents, now retired, moved into a house in the village, next to the church. Roger and his sister, meanwhile, moved in with Kathleen's mother to another house in the village. Both families remained practising Anglicans and a routine developed whereby Peter would come into the village for church every Sunday, pick up the children afterwards from their paternal grandparents and cycle back with them back to spend the rest of the day on the farm.<sup>151</sup> In her study of post-war childhood memory, space and place in Melbourne, Australia, Carla Pascoe challenges environmentally determinist studies of human geography that underplay people's agency and creativity in shaping their environment.<sup>152</sup> Different agents in the Wilkins family acted first to generate a geographical rupture in their living arrangements, then to create a new routine oriented around journeys between a grandparents' village house, church and more isolated farm. As we have seen, the leisure time Roger and his father enjoyed together in the farm as a

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<sup>149</sup> On the greater likelihood of people to marry within their class, see Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 57.

<sup>150</sup> Sorensen, *Women, Family and Class*.

<sup>151</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*; ELL07, *Roger Wilkins*.

<sup>152</sup> See Carla Pascoe, *Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered: Childhood in 1950s Australia* (Cambridge Scholars, 2011), p. 201.

result formed especially powerful emotional memories.<sup>153</sup> For Roger, the spatiality of their weekly cycle ride into the Fenland landscape remained with him into adulthood:

I've always lived in places where you can see for miles and miles and miles, nice and flat. You go to anywhere else in the country, up north, and all of a sudden it starts getting hilly, I you start going... [gestures at feeling encroached upon], you start to feel claustrophobic, feel imposed.<sup>154</sup>

In the Wilkins family, downward mobility, classed interpersonal differences, and the assertion of women's new legal rights combined to disrupt the normal ordering of family life. For Roger, as a child, the disruption was felt in terms of space and place, the emotional resonance of which had a life-long impact.

The Livingstones' passage through social change was more harmonious. Like Peter Wilkins, Norman's marital relationship brought clarity to his own class identity, but unlike Peter, it stoked a source of curiosity which was to be gradually satisfied over the course of his marriage and his social ascent at work. We will see in more detail in Chapter Four and Chapter Five the stages of occupational change the Livingstone men went through across the mid to late-twentieth century: Norman's father was a miner, Norman a draughtsman, then manager, and Stephen an art teacher and artist. When Norman met Muriel, who was a tracer at his engineering firm, he soon became aware of their different social backgrounds. The majority of post-war men and women married within, not outside their social class, but for Norman, like Peter, the transgression of this norm made a significant impression.<sup>155</sup> Norman remembered, 'going up their street, there was actually trees! And there was... drives, gardens, that sort of thing... well Wallsend didn't have that you see – it was quite low-key. And going up the street with the trees and what-have-you...'<sup>156</sup> After they were first married, Muriel had to relinquish these middle-class trappings as they moved into a small flat back in Wallsend, with an outdoor toilet and no central heating, where they had Stephen. However, as soon as Norman's earnings enabled them to, in 1961, they bought the sort

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<sup>153</sup> Chapter One, pp. 61-62.

<sup>154</sup> ELL07, *Roger Wilkins*.

<sup>155</sup> On the greater likelihood of people to marry within their class, see Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 57.

<sup>156</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

of semi-detached house with a bathroom and garden that Muriel had been used to growing up. The change in circumstances delighted Norman's father so much, he used to make regular visits on his motorbike to tend to the garden and stay over when Norman and Muriel went away on holiday. By this time, Norman had also been exposed to more exalted ways of living during his time away in the Merchant Navy. After a day's work in the engine room, he and his co-workers would be required to change into their uniforms for dinner and sit at the officers' table. Remembering how he would share his new experiences with his parents by bringing home various gifts, he explained 'they were learning as well. We were, in effect, teaching them our way of life'.<sup>157</sup>

Born in 1958, Stephen thus came into a family who were already socially mobile. As a small child, the move from the close-knit neighbourliness of Wallsend to the 'different world' of Monkseaton was traumatic.<sup>158</sup> Norman remembered that Stephen, aged three, would gaze out of the living room window saying he wanted to 'go home'.<sup>159</sup> From the perspective of middle-age, however, Stephen considered himself 'quite privileged' to have glimpsed the 'old world' and the transition he witnessed over the course of the 1960s.<sup>160</sup> Once his father became a manager, Stephen remembers the gap between his grandparents and his parents' lifestyles grow wider. Visiting Wallsend at weekends, 'it was grimy, you know. Coal dust and smut... and cinder tracks', where their extended family would meet up at weekends, going 'from house to house, in the same street... and you'd have a bit of a sing-song and that type of thing'.<sup>161</sup> Meanwhile, his mother and father became 'quite a smart couple... they went to dinner dances and my mum used to make long evening gowns, and my dad would have his suit and his dickie-bow every now and again'.<sup>162</sup> Stephen's memories of his parents' changing cultural habits at times approached a parody of intergenerational social mobility, but were in keeping with his adult subjectivity as a socially aware artist who drew on elements of his family background in the course of his work. Norman preferred to play down his own role in these changes. His family's experiences had not been particularly exceptional; he had come back from sea 'the same person', and that changing lifestyle

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

was merely in tune with 'the way of the country, the country has gone through a change'.<sup>163</sup>

Stephen, however, tended to foreground his individuality in his account of cultural progress. His personal journey saw him engage with punk subculture, go to art school and work for a spell on a Kibbutz. While broadly supportive of Stephen's creative journey, Norman remained keen that his son not deviate from their narrative of ordinary life. When Stephen described how a love of Tolstoy had helped him overcome difficulties reading aloud in class, Norman interjected 'that's a bit bragging Steve!'; just as Norman's aunt had scolded him as a child for getting 'too big for [his] boots' for wearing a white collar and tie for his apprenticeship in the late 1940s.<sup>164</sup> At that time Norman had yet to realise the social and cultural opportunities that lay ahead, from his first encounters with Muriel's neighbourhood to his own move into management and a more middle-class cultural way of life. Norman's journey through social mobility had been aided by curious parents and a mutually happy marriage; however, he retained a working-class sensibility which recalled his family's origins and occasionally surfaced to temper his son's more elaborate proclamations. Accordingly, the broadening of his own cultural horizons required the caveat that his experience was exceptional only in so far as experiences of his whole generation had been. Like other men, it was inextricably bound to the intersubjective dynamics of the relationship he had with his wife.

## **5. Patterns of Middle and Upper-middle-class Continuity**

For families, who at the beginning of the period had identified as working-class, social change was negotiated in response to improvements to material conditions, changes to education and work lives, and modified cultural habits and political outlooks. In families whose fathers had experienced middle-class childhoods, however, there was more emphasis on patterns of continuity, which, nonetheless, concealed individual and particular emotional experiences. As Savage argues, post-war middle-class claims on ordinariness owed most to greater value being attributed to the meritocratic accumulation of skill and ability, in opposition to pre-war deference to inherited wealth

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<sup>163</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

and position.<sup>165</sup> There were also certain aspects of middle-class culture that often spanned generations, including attitudes towards philanthropy, forms of social organisation and institutional affiliations.<sup>166</sup> However, such trappings were more overtly concerned with the intergenerational sustenance of social status and cultures of personal betterment than was the case for working-class families. While it is true to say that men from working-class backgrounds, like Norman and Stephen Livingstone, Martin Curd or John Taylor each aspired in their own ways to improve their work and home lives, they did so in tension with class heritages, which they each negotiated in their own way. In the middle-class Birchwood and Coverley families the tensions were less pronounced, though nor was it considered available or desirable to adopt upper-middle-class lifestyles.<sup>167</sup> The post-war middle-class may have benefitted from meritocratic shift; but in any case, those families were more accustomed to choice and opportunity than their working-class counterparts had been. Consequently, they recounted their life stories with an assuredness of class status and even paternalistic attitudes towards social groups deemed less fortunate. Nonetheless, the structuring of what was considered *normal* family life, albeit with some modifications, remained anchored to the performance of male breadwinning and female homemaking.

Asked whether he remembered thinking of himself as belonging to a particular social class during the 1960s, Alan Birchwood replied, 'Yes. Erm, by that time, I was a young professional... Yes, I would. Aspiring to better things sort of thing. It took a bit of time to transfer from graduate member of the Mechanicals... to associate membership...'.<sup>168</sup> He was referring to his ascent up the hierarchy of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, an industry body to which he assigned a great deal of personal, social and professional status. In fact, he had misspoken; this particular 'transfer' saw him not graduate *within* the 'Mechanicals', but rather to *move out of* the less prestigious Institute of Electrical Engineers and into the Mechanicals. As he described, 'that was a

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<sup>165</sup> See Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p. 235. Savage argues that the 'increasing embrace of merit, technique and skill' became 'markers of managerial and leadership capacity' in the post-war period.

<sup>166</sup> For a sociological perspective on the middle-class tendency to cultivate these ties, see Young and Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, pp. 87-98.

<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, it was notable that both Mark Birchwood and Andrew Coverley, like their working-class counterparts, remembered entreaties not to mix with 'rough' families. ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*; SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>168</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

red-letter day when we got our transfers, because we were then engineers to be reckoned with!'.<sup>169</sup> He went on:

I mean, there's your status at work – the fact that you're recognised as, oh yeah, quite a good bloke, but also in society outside, to say that you were a chartered engineer does carry some weight. Not as much as we would like. Er because everybody knows "oh, engineer, you're the bloke that comes and reads the meter". We've been fighting that for years, it's a lost cause I'm afraid but anyway. That was a real... a really, really good step in my professional career. Getting that was a major, major achievement. Which was rather nice.<sup>170</sup>

In confirming his distinction from the sort of 'bloke that comes and reads the meter', his associational affiliation contributed positively to his professional sense of self. It also betrayed a sense of middle-class belonging and social organisation that had permeated his conception of work and society throughout his life.<sup>171</sup>

Alan's parents had met in the early 1920s at the local philharmonic society.<sup>172</sup> When their marriage broke down ten years later, his mother started a relationship with a Hungarian refugee, which sparked involvement in a variety of left-wing intellectual circles, which including links to the Communist Party of Great Britain and his mothers' ownership of shares in the Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker* (now *The Morning Star*).<sup>173</sup> It is indicative of the esoteric nature of the family's relationship to left-wing politics that in the 1950s Alan courted his wife at fashionable London Hungarian restaurant *The Gay Hussar*, courtesy of a personal family friendship with the owner Victor Sassie. Fellow patrons reportedly included T.S. Eliot, Aneurin Bevan and Barbara Castle.<sup>174</sup> Just before his courtship, Alan's first job had been secured through the family's 'Sheffield friends' who ensured that his disrupted wartime education should not prejudice employers about his abilities.<sup>175</sup> By the time he and his wife had started a

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> On the growth of professional associational life between the late-nineteenth and late-twentieth centuries, see Harold James Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (Routledge, 1989), p. 20.

<sup>172</sup> ELL04, Alan Birchwood.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> *The Gay Hussar, 1953–Present*, <http://gayhussar.co.uk/pdf/GHHHistory.pdf> [Accessed June 2018]

<sup>175</sup> ELL04, Alan Birchwood.

family in the 1960s, they were members of several local associations, including the middle-class Round Table and Ladies Circle, who provided vital assistance during their young daughter's terminal leukaemia. That tragic incident prompted them to establish a charity devoted to researching her condition so others might benefit.<sup>176</sup> Alan's wife was also involved in a number of community activities, including the 'Mum's Club' for women whose 'husbands weren't particularly interested in them having a social life of their own', to whom Alan once gave a talk on DIY.<sup>177</sup> The themes of conjugal partnership, civic and political engagement and paternalistic forms of altruistic endeavour all accord with the uses of twentieth century middle-class associational life observed in work by Helen McCarthy.<sup>178</sup> They also contrast with the working-class working men's club movement, whose social organisation owed more to informal patterns of welfare provision, along with homosocial drinking.<sup>179</sup> Alan's participation in middle-class philanthropic associations, together with his implied disapproval of disinterested husbands and blokes who read electricity meters, betrays a tension within middle-class paternalism, which, as we shall see, was echoed in the middle-class Coverleys' experience.

The most striking of the Birchwoods' associational affiliations, however, was, and continues to be, pan-generational and rooted in structures of childhood homosociality. In 1908, Robert Baden-Powell's influential *Scouting for Boys* was first serialised, marking an important early stage in the inauguration of the Boy Scout movement.<sup>180</sup> The same year, Alan Birchwood's grandfather went to see Baden-Powell speak, became a Scout-master himself, and began a familial acquaintance that would span four generations. Alan's father was also a Scout-master; Alan's own experience ended with the junior-level Cubs, due to the interruption of war; but Mark, when interviewed, had participated at all levels and eventually become a Scout-leader himself.<sup>181</sup> Mark fondly

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain' in *The Historical Journal*, 50 (2007); Helen McCarthy, 'Service Clubs, Citizenship and Equality: Gender Relations and Middle-class Associations in Britain Between the Wars' in *Historical Research*, 81 (2008).

<sup>179</sup> Working men's clubs were in fact more family-oriented than their name or reputation suggests, but nonetheless centred on everyday male-dominated spaces for drinking and games. See Hall, *Being a Man, Being a Member*.

<sup>180</sup> Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (Chatto & Windus, 2007), pp. 86-87.

<sup>181</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.



remembered leading the Cub Scout St George's Day parade aged just eight. A few weeks earlier, Alan had arranged for the local Cub leader to visit their home and invite Mark to become involved.<sup>182</sup> With modest understatement, Allan said he was 'rather proud' that Scouting has gone 'right through the family'.<sup>183</sup> The Scouting movement is widely considered to be the most successful and enduring boys' association of the twentieth century.<sup>184</sup> In many communities, it was also a middle-class bridging institution to the church, for families in whom adults may have lapsed. One Huddersfield working-class boy, aptly summed up its status in the community:

Let me say that the sort of kid I was wouldn't join the Scouts. There's a social difference. Now even when I was seven or eight all of us scruffy, low, working-class kids would be playing around St John's Church, and the Brownies and the Cubs would meet in the church hall there. Up we'd go into the yard and climb up to the windows, and we'd push our faces right up – right scruffy lot we were – and stare at all these brownies and cubs inside with all bright, clean uniforms. They seemed so pretty, so clean. I always hated them.<sup>185</sup>

Mark's decision to join in the late 1960s had been driven less by an interest in Christianity and more by the opportunity to take part in outdoor activities with his friends. But it had been directed by his father's belief in middle-class associational recreation and a desire to continue the family's relationship with the movement. However, over the courses of their lives as father and son, Scouting had come to mean much more. A central theme of Mark's testimony was his having fallen short of his father's example in a number of areas of life. However, with his participation in the Scouts, he was able to achieve more than his father had, eliciting Alan's unreserved pride in the process.

Like their middle-class counterparts the Birchwoods, the Coverleys also evinced a paternalistic approach to social egalitarianism. Andrew remembered that his parents

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<sup>182</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>183</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*, p. 76; Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>185</sup> Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class: Some General Themes Raised by a Study of 88 Working-Class Children in a Northern Industrial City* (Pelican, 1962), p. 103.

thought they should do 'everything you could to help the poor'.<sup>186</sup> More overtly than the Birchwoods, however, Andrew located this mentality in a class context, which evidently caused him some disquiet.

Being a teaching family we were definitely distinct from a lot of other people. But I think that was me more than – well no it must be your upbringing – I think it was that 'we must help the disadvantaged' business. It is funny isn't it, through sort of concern and so on you are actually reinforcing class barriers, because you are sort of admitting that there are lower class of people who need help. I don't like admitting that really, but it's true.<sup>187</sup>

He described this attitude as a form of 'naïve snobbery'.<sup>188</sup> It was a contradictory position because it sought to alleviate inequality on the one hand while reinforcing a social hierarchy on the other. Such nuances were not recognised by his father Peter, who disapproved of middle and upper-classes controlling attitudes towards their children. The contradiction was never resolved for Andrew, but it was sustained through an unfailing belief that their family's approach was at once both exemplary and universal: 'I thought everybody was like us, I thought everybody shared the same opinions. We are all like this. We all have this thing about helping the disadvantaged; we all don't like super authority'.<sup>189</sup> Their middle-class status was defined in opposition to social groups above and below, but was nonetheless expressed with the confidence that *everybody* should and did share their attitude. Going to secondary school was socially enlightening for Andrew, but he remained – and remains – true to his family's values: 'I was very surprised when I heard other opinions being expressed, other than the ones we took for granted as a family. I just presumed that everybody else was wrong. I still do to a certain degree'.<sup>190</sup>

Sutcliffe-Braithwaite draws on the Coverley testimony in the course of her research into discourses of class, deference and ordinariness. She uses Andrew's reflections to illustrate the ambiguity of classed experiences in a culture in which the

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<sup>186</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

normative attitude was to repudiate snobbery and class distinction.<sup>191</sup> We might also assess Andrew's attitude from a life-course perspective. In his childhood, Andrew had lived in a large, relatively isolated house. They may have been a family of six living solely on a teacher's salary, but they were culturally middle-class and excluded by their social geography. Andrew went on to become a sound engineer. After he got married, they lived with his parents for a year before moving to an estate. He reflected:

I had always envisaged something more like I had been brought up in – I wanted a big rambling house and a big rambling garden, but we had to have somewhere of our own, we couldn't forever live in my parents' pockets, and we got what we could afford and that was an extremely small bungalow.<sup>192</sup>

He went on to describe how his disappointment was partly mitigated by the pleasure he now takes in his children having more friends to play with than he had had growing up. While he had retained some of the middle-class sensibilities his parents had passed on, having experienced downward social mobility in terms of income he had also been given cause to reflect on some of the contradictions that underpinned their outlook. The Coverley's 'snobbery' was at some level an exception to the post-war dislike of status hierarchies that Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and others have observed, but it was also at some level commensurate with these discourses. 'Naïve snobbery' was a phrase used self-critically by Andrew, a member of the younger generation, from a position of greater social enlightenment later in life. He remained appreciative of the values his parents had inculcated but had come to recognise that the condescension implicit in their attitudes was problematic. At the time however, the whole family had refuted ideas of social distinction and were confident that their philosophy was and should have been universally applied.

At first glance, the upper-middle-class Henrys appeared to share little of Andrew Coverley's critical self-reflection. Norman's confident assertion was that 'I think if you get down to basics, if you have it you don't want to lose it; if you haven't got it, you want it. And that is really the social divide.'<sup>193</sup> It was indeed this social outlook that

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<sup>191</sup> Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Discourses of 'Class'*, p. 305.

<sup>192</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>193</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

underpinned the attitudes and behaviours described in their narrative, from the decision to send Charlie to board at an elite public school, to Norman's denouncement of blue-collar work and his intervention to secure his son a job at a top City of London company. However, their testimony was also characterised by rhetorical understatement. Norman described his family as 'moderately comfortable middle-class' and 'privileged financially to a certain extent'; never 'upper-class', 'upper-middle-class' or 'wealthy'.<sup>194</sup> Despite having five servants and a nanny during Charlie's childhood, they were only 'comparatively well-off';<sup>195</sup> despite having attended expensive public schools, Norman and Charlie described themselves as 'philistines', 'badly educated' and not 'very cultured'.<sup>196</sup> Charlie was a mere 'army brat' having been regularly relocated as a child of an officer.<sup>197</sup> As Andrew Miles and Mike Savage have argued, such modesty and understatement have come to underpin the enduring cultural refrain of the 'gentlemanly ethic' despite the rise of technocratic meritocracy.<sup>198</sup> The sort of 'gentlemanly motifs' which permeate this refrain, they suggest, endure as part of a 'fluid and mobile cultural repertoire', which adapts to confirm a distinction from the 'common and the mundane' according to the requirements of particular social situations.<sup>199</sup> Norman and Charlie's deployment of such motifs in the social situation of the interview confirmed precisely this distinction. Evidence that the Henrys' turns of phrase was more affectation than substantiation, came in the otherwise exceptional experiences and achievements they narrated throughout the testimony. Norman's admission that he was 'enormously unaccomplished' when it came to domestic matters was qualified by revelations of his substantial achievements in public life.<sup>200</sup> Charlie's recollection that he 'grew up as a philistine' came from his adult perspective as an opera connoisseur.<sup>201</sup> The Henrys were manifestly concerned with social status, and consolidated their place towards the top of the social hierarchy with their cultural and rhetorical expressions.

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<sup>194</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Miles and Savage, *The Strange Survival Story*.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 603.

<sup>200</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

Such consolidation also depended on successful transfer of privilege between father and son. Norman was keen to assert his role in preparing Charlie for gendered participation in particular work and leisure social circles.<sup>202</sup> He was similarly eager to document his influence in Charlie's political outlook, though he conceded that it owed more to socio-cultural, than paternal, conditioning:

What you can't escape is the bubble. You know we complain about the Westminster being alienated from working-class Newcastle people or something. But we were, all our friends were in a certain social financial background by and large, and we tended, I suppose, to have the same attitude to things. I suspect that we probably mainly voted Conservative rather than Labour, whereas if I'd been up in Scotland it might have been quite different. But I think that if your father and mother were Labour voters, the odds are you would have been one. Similarly, if they were... he's practically a fascist because of me, basically.<sup>203</sup>

In the same way Charlie had protested his own agency when it came to finding employment, he also argued that his 'abhorrence of socialism' had more to do with 'the disastrous Wilson-Callaghan government' of the 1970s than his father's influence.<sup>204</sup> Just as sons from middle and working-class backgrounds had done, Charlie formed his own political outlook in negotiation with his paternal inheritance. Moreover, in common with all father-son testimonies, their biographies were woven around socio-cultural chronologies to produce subjectivities which drew on their family, as well as work and wider societal circumstances. In the Henrys' case, however, Norman conception of what he was handing down was fundamental.

Despite his Conservative worldview and belief in the traditional class hierarchy, Norman shared some of Andrew Coverley's interest in, if not empathy with, different social groups from his own. His universalising assertions that political outlooks automatically transferred intergenerationally, and that 'those who don't have it, want it', underestimated heterogeneous patterns of political inheritance and social aspiration, as we have seen. But, aware that his own subjectivity was informed by the exclusionary

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<sup>202</sup> See Chapter Five, p. 276.

<sup>203</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

forces of his social conditions, he was consequently curious about the conditions of others. His mention of Scotland in the passage above alludes to his Scottish upbringing. His relatively rarefied childhood, growing up in an upper-middle-class household and attending boarding school, would have insulated him from everyday experiences of broader Scottish life; however, it nonetheless gave him a regional perspective, which he frequently drew on to support his appreciations of society beyond his present-day immediate cultural environs. At one point in the interview, he explicitly referenced this curiosity (and, perhaps, his motivations for taking part in my research):

*Norman: But what I think is interesting about our conversation and your study, basically, is that... clearly the backgrounds of the people you're interviewing is going to be very different. So, it's going to be quite interesting.*

*Interviewer: In what sense, across generations, or...?*

*Norman: Let us say I was an old age pensioner living on 150 pounds a week or whatever it is, and he was a bus driver and so on... all the things we've been talking about would be practically irrelevant.<sup>205</sup>*

Norman's intervention in this passage is another example of the conscious critique of cultural scripts discussed in Chapter One.<sup>206</sup> His expressions of genuine interest in broader society helped nuance some of the dismissive generalisations he made; however, they also betrayed an oppositional framing of society, drawn along class lines. Unlike fathers and sons who repudiated class distinction, drawing on personal narratives of social mobility and universalising notions of ordinariness, Norman wanted to preserve the social hierarchy and his family's position within it. Nonetheless, even within the continuity that underpinned his intergenerational transfer of attitudes and cultural standards, Charlie, like other sons of his generation, ventured greater claims than his father to individuality and self-expression.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Chapter One, p. 59.

## Conclusion

It would be too simplistic to suggest that the extraordinariness of the Henrys' testimony only serves to reinforce the discourses of ordinariness drawn elsewhere. Ordinary was a fluid and capacious category, invoked to assert working-class pride, to reconcile processes of social mobility, and to defend participation in universalising human and social experiences, whether from working or middle-class origins. It interacted with normality, which was used to underline commonly understood gender and generational roles, and to set parameters for the physical and psychological health of families at a time when *the family* as a social entity came under increasing pressure. In reflecting on their subjectivity across life-courses, fathers engaged in particular negotiations with their families' cultural, classed origins, as sons carved out life narratives characterised more by independence and individuality. Both generations remained bound by their ties to male breadwinning, during a period which saw sons afforded greater opportunities, but fathers also engaging with new industrial landscapes, rising affluence and confidence leading to opportunities for material improvement and financial risk. Men's relationships with their work in these contexts was closely intertwined with their social and political perspectives, which created moments of intergenerational tension and harmony in the familial reproduction of masculine subjectivities. From the early 1970s, their life narratives, alongside the society in which they lived, became more ambivalent and diffuse. Whatever fathers and sons' claims to normal, ordinary, family lives, viewed intimately, across life-courses, their narrations proved more particular than many of them would have us believe.

## Chapter Three.

### Particular and Peripheral Parenthood

The decades following the Second World War were a critical time in the history of parenting. The popularisation of 'expert' advice and the emphasis on a new generation of children to map a post-war democratic citizenship had profound implications for parents, as well as the children themselves. But post-war 'child-centred' psychology focused almost myopically on the mother-child bond, with fathers located firmly on the periphery. This dynamic was commensurate with post-war gender roles in households, in which childcare was considered synonymous with a woman's domestic responsibilities. Nonetheless, as Laura King has illustrated, there were growing calls for men to become more attentive and less distant and authoritarian fathers, in accordance with the prioritisation of children's developmental needs and to mitigate against the risk of juvenile delinquency.<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that post-war shifts towards more child-centred parenting had relatively little impact on the type of relationships fathers had with their children. Just as they had in the inter-war period, men remained culturally and temporally bound by male breadwinning; although, as had also been the case before the war, such restrictions sometimes pushed against their personal instincts. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter Five, the more time spent away working, the better fathers they were considered to be.<sup>2</sup> In practice, as they had for generations, father-son relationships tended to deepen as they unfolded across life-courses; the post-war child-centred moment did little to encourage paternal involvement in infant care. Moreover, parenting was a two-way process; as children grew into their own social worlds, they increasingly craved the attention of friends and siblings, less so parents. Despite their exclusion from day-to-day parenting matters, however, post-war fathers engaged in joint conjugal approaches to the passing on of values and encouragement of certain attitudes and behaviours. As sons got older, they developed particular relationships with their fathers, informed by their obligation to succeed them as

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<sup>1</sup> Laura King, "Now you see a great many men pushing their pram proudly': Family-orientated Masculinity Represented and Experienced in Mid-twentieth-century Britain' in *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), p. 600; King, *Family Men*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Five, pp. 192-193.



breadwinners, and in negotiation with new choices available to them as they carved out their adult masculinities. While for many, post-war affluence created conditions for more privatised family living, the predominance of maternal childcare in the home, and male breadwinning outside it, remained the chief structuring forces of father-son relationships.

## **1. Mid-century Cultures of Parenting: Patterns of Continuity**

The majority of inter-war parenting advice was directed towards mothers, in the form of expert advice literature, through schools, and in the emergence of welfare and child guidance clinics. The methods endorsed were predominantly behaviourist, focusing on training infants into routines through the instilment of self-control and obedience.<sup>3</sup> Mothers remained wary of tackling these issues with psychoanalytic approaches because of undesirable associations with sexuality.<sup>4</sup> But as Deborah Thom has cautioned, a chronology that traces the journey from inter-war behaviourism to post-war child-centredness does not adequately reflect the range of approaches and practices that were in evidence across the whole mid-twentieth century period.<sup>5</sup> One exception to the behaviourist model came in the form of the 'fathercraft' movement, which had a more child-centred focus on psychological and emotional development.<sup>6</sup> Between 1919 and 1939, 'Fathers' Councils' had been set up in welfare clinics with an agenda to promote the idea that male involvement in child-rearing was both socially acceptable and morally improving.<sup>7</sup> It is telling, however, that grand concepts of morality and emotional development were thought more appealing for fathers, who were concerned less with day-to-day parenting, than mothers, for whom behaviourist strategies were attractive combatants to immediate problems, such as bed-wetting and ill-discipline. Nonetheless, as Tim Fisher argues, British fathercraft may have laid the groundwork for more mutualist discourses of parenting after the war, even if its advice held that the 'the actual care and handling' of young children should remain with

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<sup>3</sup> Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 114; Tisdall, *Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood*, p. 33; Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, *A Labour of Love: The Experience of Parenthood in Britain 1900-1950* (Sidgwick & Jackson 1993), pp. 51-52.

<sup>4</sup> Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Thom, *"Beating Children is Wrong"*, especially p. 267.

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, *Fathercraft*, p. 455.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 441.

mothers.<sup>8</sup> As Fisher also acknowledges, fathercraft was relatively small in scope and there was little evidence to suggest its advice was taken up on any scale.<sup>9</sup> Like the child guidance clinics catering for mothers, the number of Fathers Councils was limited; unlike the clinics, however, there was little sign that demand outstripped supply.<sup>10</sup> While there was a growing appetite for information to help with parenting among mothers, fathers were less likely to see parenting as their concern.

The fathercraft movement was driven by a longstanding a middle-class philanthropic tradition of providing education and support for supposedly less-advantaged families.<sup>11</sup> Members reasoned that better housing for working-class families had created more conducive environments for meaningful paternal engagements.<sup>12</sup> While it was true that improvements to living conditions in the inter-war period were felt in working-class, as well as middle-class homes, there remained considerable variance of experience across the period, geographically and according to individual circumstances.<sup>13</sup> For families across classes in the inter-war period, better homes with gardens, along with reduced working hours and paid holidays, fostered opportunities for fathers to spend more time with their children.<sup>14</sup> As Alison Light has argued, such conditions, for many, contributed to a more feminised, domesticated masculinity.<sup>15</sup> For others, long-term unemployment and poor housing created more fraught conditions in which men were spending increasing amounts of time at home.<sup>16</sup> Joanna Bourke paints a mixed picture of inter-war working class family life. Workless fathers took opportunities to bake for their children, read them stories and bathed them, while those working cherished the snatched moments of play and intimacy between the end of the

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<sup>8</sup> The quote is from a 1939 edition of *Mother and Child*, entitled 'Modern Aspects of Fathercraft'. See *ibid.*, p. 455.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 443-446.

<sup>10</sup> Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 115. Thomson notes Thom's emphasis on 'from below' demands for expert advice among inter-war mothers.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, *Fathercraft*, p. 442.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>13</sup> Jon Lawrence makes the point about cross-class improvements to living standards in Lawrence, *Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain*, p. 273. The regional variation of experience is highlighted in Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, p. 195; in the early 1930s unemployment was as high as 67% in Jarrow, near Newcastle and just 3% in High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire.

<sup>14</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 52-57; Humphries and Gordon, *Labour of Love* p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (Routledge, 1991), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> On the social impact of long-term unemployment, see Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, p. 193.

working day and their children's bedtime.<sup>17</sup> Some men were ashamed that their unemployment would render them less worthy of their children's love and respect; others turned to drunkenness, gambling, neglect and abuse.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever fathers' personalities and circumstances, as oral history accounts of the period have shown, there remained certain cultural underpinnings of gendered parenting. In inter-war Lancashire, where, in many families, female cotton-workers were chief breadwinners, husbands' domestic duties were nonetheless limited to those performed behind closed doors, such as scrubbing floors, cooking, bathing children. If men were seen publicly performing domestic duties, the dreaded epithet 'cissy' was feared by husband and wife alike.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Robert Williamson from Bradford, who was made redundant in the 1930s, washed nappies, bathed and settled his daughters; however, such behaviour went against the grain – it was customary to label such men disparagingly as 'Mary-Annes'.<sup>20</sup> Even where men were willing and conditions necessitating, adult male involvement in infant care could not shift its associations with effeminacy. The imagined unsuitability of men for such roles was underlined by the custom of children being 'boarded out' to care homes, rather than left to the care of fathers if a mother was absented through death or severe illness.<sup>21</sup> It may have been the case that fathers were spending more time with their children in many inter-war homes; however, such engagements remained partial and conditioned by cultural understandings of gendered suitability.

The Second World War was a tumultuous time for parents. Removal of children from mothers in mass evacuation programmes in 1939 and 1940 brought to light classed and raced social tensions.<sup>22</sup> The departure of men to serve in the forces contributed to anxieties surrounding the absence of strong father figures in cases of juvenile delinquency in the 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>23</sup> As Alan Allport has described, in

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<sup>17</sup> Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*, pp. 81, 95-96

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96; see also Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, Chapter Two.

<sup>19</sup> Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 118; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Humphries and Gordon, *Labour of Love* pp. 85, 99-101.

<sup>21</sup> Abrams, *Daddy*, pp. 234-240. Abrams notes, however, the emotional torment this led to for many widowers.

<sup>22</sup> On the trauma and social consequences of mass evacuation, see Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (Jonathan Cape, 1991), pp. 60-64.

<sup>23</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 52.

many cases, the tight bonds formed between mothers and their children during wartime made it difficult for fathers to re-integrate upon their return.<sup>24</sup> However, one of the war's most significant legacies was the psychological impact of mother-child separation.<sup>25</sup> Even for non-evacuated families, the demand for women's war work had led to outsourcing of nursery care provision on a mass scale.<sup>26</sup> Denise Riley has argued that post-war governments' invocations of the dangers of 'maternal deprivation' was a 'feminist folk-myth' that may have been misconceived.<sup>27</sup> However, in general, the importance of the mother-child bond was only reinforced by the challenges war presented to it. Certainly, working-class mothers in post-war Lancashire were especially focused on their children's upbringing having been aware of deleterious effects of wartime separation.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, as Mathew Thomson has argued, the collective national experience of war's chaos and disorder led to a post-war culture which privileged the protection of children in the home as part of a nuclear family unit.<sup>29</sup> Full employment and the creation of the Welfare State (including provision for family allowances for every child after the first), provided security for working-class parents to realise this ideal with confidence.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the war, notwithstanding increasing numbers of nannies and *au pairs*, many middle-class women too were returning to full-time motherhood.<sup>31</sup> Like their working-class counterparts, however, most middle-class men remained shielded from matters concerning their children's care.

Post-war cultures of parenting were outgrowths of inter-war experiences, wartime child separation and the evolution of expert parenting advice, which reached wider audiences after 1945. Political and cultural discourse requiring men to be attentive fathers and companionate husbands may have contributed to the idealised image of the modern family, but when it came to early-years care, the prevailing post-

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<sup>24</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Lee Downs, 'Au Revoir les Enfants: Wartime Evacuation and the Politics of Childhood in France and Britain, 1939-45' in *History Workshop Journal*, 82 (2016), p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Denise Riley, 'War in the Nursery' in *Feminist Review*, (1979), pp. 83-87.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 141.

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, pp. 232-239.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Abrams describes this generation of mothers' resentment at not having participated in the more emancipatory 1960s generation in Abrams, *Daddy*, pp. 67-72. On nannies and *au pairs*, see Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 133.

war child psychology located fathers firmly on the periphery of parenting practices. John Bowlby's influential 'attachment theory', which cautioned against the dangers of 'maternal deprivation' had been developed through the observance of children separated from their parents. Published in 1953, *Childcare and the Growth of Love* was instrumental in advancing the view that a 'warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother' was essential to the mental health and psychological development of infants and young children.<sup>32</sup> The importance of the mother-child bond was further emphasised in the radio broadcasts of Donald Winnicott, which ran from 1943 to 1962,<sup>33</sup> and in the burgeoning popularity of advice manuals such as Benjamin Spock's best-selling *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, first published in 1946. Such child-centred discourse marked a shift towards emphasising the immaturity of children and mothers' responsibilities for attending to their needs, as opposed to behaviourist advice, which focused on training children to integrate into an adult world.<sup>34</sup> As Deborah Thom has observed, although the vernacular advice seldom explicitly acknowledged its Freudian underpinnings, it nonetheless subscribed to the Kleinian model of psychoanalysis, which focused on mothers and feeding, rather than fathers and sexual desire.<sup>35</sup>

John Bowlby was explicit in his reasoning for excluding the father from early-years childcare:

The reason for [fathers' exclusion] is that almost all evidence concerns the child's relation to his mother, which is without doubt in ordinary circumstances by far his most important relationship during these early years ... In the young child's eyes, father plays second fiddle.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bowlby, *Child Care*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> See Anne Karpf, 'Constructing and Addressing the 'Ordinary Devoted Mother'' in *History Workshop Journal*, 78 (2014).

<sup>34</sup> Laura Tisdall suggests some of the deleterious effects of infantilising children on both parents and children in Tisdall, *Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>35</sup> Thom, *"Beating Children is Wrong"*, p. 275.

<sup>36</sup> Bowlby, *Child Care*, pp. 15-16.

So common was it for fathers to be absented, Donald Winnicott felt it necessary to urge mothers to introduce them to their children, albeit in carefully controlled situations, such as by watching bath time.

No doubt it is often far simpler to get the baby to bed before father comes home, just as it is a good idea to get the washing done and the food cooked. But many of you will agree from your experience that it is a great help in the relation between married people when they share day by day the little details of experience in the care of their infant.<sup>37</sup>

Such incursions, Winnicott suggested, were secondary to a father's principal concern of providing moral support for his wife, backing her authority and exhibiting a 'lively personality' which might encourage his child to distinguish him from other men.<sup>38</sup> In practice, mothers were ambivalent towards attachment theory advice.<sup>39</sup> Its encouragement to immerse oneself in the mother-child relationship represented a liberating departure from strict behavioural methods, yet it also made considerable emotional and psychological demands on mothers.<sup>40</sup> The message about child-centredness, broadly conceived, gained traction after the war, but most mothers drew general principles from it rather than enacting particular strategies.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, as David Cowan has argued, post-war expert advice was only one aspect of vernacular understandings of 'modern parenting', which also drew on influences from kin, communities and the individual relationships mothers had with their children.<sup>42</sup>

With such varied and diffuse practices, doubtless there was scope for greater paternal input into practices of parenting. However, post-war social conditions largely proscribed any significant deviation from female childrearing. The gradual lifting of the marriage bar led more women to continue paid work after marrying, but the majority

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<sup>37</sup> Winnicott, *The Child*, p. 113.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>39</sup> Tisdall, *Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood*, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. For an account of mothers' conflicting feelings towards child-centred ideas see Roberts, *Women and Families*, Chapter Eight.

<sup>41</sup> On generalised interpretations of the advice see Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 143; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 143. On selectively adopting the advice see, for example Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, pp. 119, 131; J.W.B. Douglas, *The Home and the School* (Panther, 1964), p. 33; Newson and Newson, *Four Years Old in an Urban Community*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>42</sup> Cowan, 'Modern Parenting'.

still withdrew from the labour market during their first pregnancy.<sup>43</sup> The payment of family allowances directly to mothers, enshrined in law from 1946, was on one hand a welcome recognition of women's domestic labour, but on the other only contributed to female homemaker-male breadwinner hegemony.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, home-helps, babysitters and nursery schools, which replaced the wartime fulltime day nurseries, were designed to help mothers in the home rather than at work.<sup>45</sup> It was true that many of the post-war social studies had reason to celebrate newly modernised fathers, who bathed and clothed their children, read them stories and invested time in their nurture.<sup>46</sup> But such accounts often overplayed men's involvement in practice.<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth and John Newsom were keen to celebrate 'the willingness of so many fathers to participate actively in looking after... young children';<sup>48</sup> but went on to state that...

...it is clear that what the father does for the children, and what he is expected to do, must be considered in this broader context. His job is likely to affect not only the amount of time he spends with his family but also the extent to which he is prepared to help in the baby's care; indeed, the whole pattern of family living is determined by the father's hours of work.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, Richard Hoggart thought fathers would only 'take turns with the baby if their job releases them and not too tired'.<sup>50</sup> Laura King has drawn on national press coverage to argue that pram-pushing and other signifiers of infant care contributed to a growing social acceptance of 'family-oriented' men after 1945;<sup>51</sup> but she concedes that in

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<sup>43</sup> See Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 4; for example, the marriage bar remained at Barclays as late as 1961, and at the Foreign Office until the 1970s. See also A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb, *Twentieth-century British Social Trends* (St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 292; in 1951, 36.6% of 16-24 year-old married women worked, falling to 24.4% of 25-34 year-olds. In 1961, the number was 41.8% falling to 29.5%. See also Thane, *Family Life*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>44</sup> Joya Misra, 'Mothers or Workers?: The Value of Women's Labor: Women and the Emergence of Family Allowance Policy' in *Gender & Society*, 12 (1998), pp. 385-386; Todd, *The People*, pp. 158-159.

<sup>45</sup> Peplar, *Family Matters*, pp. 26-28.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, pp. 28-30; Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> For revisionist accounts, see Davis, *Critical Perspective*; Finch and Summerfield, *Companionate Marriage*.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Newsom and John Newsom, *Patterns of Infant Care in an Urban Community* (Pelican, 1963), pp. 139-140.

<sup>49</sup> Newsom and Newsom, *Four Years Old*, p. 214.

<sup>50</sup> Hoggart, *Uses*, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> King, 'Now you see a great many men pushing their pram proudly'.

practice, there was little change to pre-war gendered divisions of responsibility for children.<sup>52</sup>

In many respects, circumstances after the war were less conducive to attentive fathering than had been the case before the war, when fathercraft had been advocating child-centred philosophies and some men had been required to undertake domestic duties while their wives worked. There may have been a cultural shift towards the increasing acceptability of attentive fathers after the war, but there had also been plenty of tactile, intimate and devoted fathers in the first half of the twentieth century and for generations before that.<sup>53</sup> Between 1945 and the early 1970s, virtually all men were detained for too long by their work each day to take on anything beyond incidental and timebound childcare responsibilities. As we shall see in Chapter Five, nor did transformations to men's leisure in the home necessarily lead to more family-oriented behaviours. Post-war childcare advice only rubber-stamped these conventions. It was certainly the case that many post-war fathers had meaningful and emotional relationships with their sons; but just as they had before the war, they grew closer to their sons over the course of the child's life: from the predominantly maternal influence during infancy, through childhood and adolescence into early adulthood, when he too would become a male breadwinner.

## **2. Family Planning, Childbirth and Early-years Care**

Between 1950 and 1970, the average of age of a woman on her wedding day fell from just over 24 to just over 22; while, over the same period her average age on the birth of her first child fell from just under 26 to just under 24.<sup>54</sup> The habit of getting married and having children was as normative as it had ever been, and with most families feeling better off than their predecessors, there seemed little reason to delay starting a family. Research into the gendering of family planning has sketched a trajectory of male responsibility for contraception in the inter-war period through post-war joint decision-making to mostly female responsibility after the contraceptive pill

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<sup>52</sup> Davis and King, *Gendered Perspectives*, pp. 71-72..

<sup>53</sup> See for example Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 162; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> Gavin Thompson, Oliver Hawkins, Aliyah Dar and Mark Taylor, *Olympic Britain: Social and Economic Change since the 1908 and 1948 London Games* (House of Commons Library), p. 23.



was made available to married couples in 1961.<sup>55</sup> Joint decision-making has been cited as a characteristic of more companionate marriages, but Kate Fisher has argued that even in such partnerships male involvement in reproductive choices betrayed a latent element of patriarchal control.<sup>56</sup> For the post-war fathers interviewed, however, family planning was predominantly led by their wives, in the same way their weddings had been.<sup>57</sup> As far fathers were concerned, conception required little emotional or cognitive investment; it was not planned, just expected. As Henry Curd explained, 'Yes, we always wanted a family, because that's part of the process of life'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Peter Wilkins remembered 'Well, I think it just came along... erm... well we both liked kids, you know. Do you know, I can't... I think she just found she was pregnant'.<sup>59</sup>

The moment of childbirth itself could be an emotionally conflicted time for post-war men. Established in 1948, the National Health Service had contributed to the medicalisation of having children, sharply decreasing the number of home births.<sup>60</sup> Culturally, childbirth remained the domain of female family members, and the displacement of women from homes to hospitals created a further layer of exclusion for fathers.<sup>61</sup> When their interlocutor introduced a part of the questionnaire to the Tillets by saying 'This section is about childbirth', Harry's wife interrupted to exclaim 'Well count him out then!'.<sup>62</sup> Even the most modest gestures towards paternity leave were not considered by most employers until later decades.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the birth of a son or daughter triggered natural yearnings in men that they responded to in a variety of ways. It was considered normal for men to be notified of their nascent parenthood via phone from the hospital, wherein their wives would stay for several days. Bill Taylor's experience in 1955 was not untypical:

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<sup>55</sup> Davis and King, *Gendered Perspectives*, pp. 75-78; Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage*, especially pp. 189-192; 236-237.

<sup>56</sup> Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage*, especially pp. 189-192; 236-237.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Religion and Society* pp. 30-31; just as women were more likely than men to attend church, they were also more likely to arrange weddings.

<sup>58</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>59</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>60</sup> Davidoff, *Family Story*, p. 209.

<sup>61</sup> See Jackson, *Fatherhood*, p. 125. Between 1920 and 1970, the number of first-borns born at home fell from 80 per cent to one per cent.

<sup>62</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>63</sup> Davis and King, *Gendered Perspectives*, pp. 81-83.

I was at work, having to make the tea and I had a moment, had a cup of tea, and they said, "what is it? Boy or girl?", "what do you mean?", "well, haven't you found out?", "no, no... well, they'll tell me later on I suppose". And they said, "surely you must have rung 'em up and asked them, you know, what's been born. You better get on the telephone now and ask them!" [laughter]. So that's how I found out, it was a boy.<sup>64</sup>

Bill's disinterest in the baby's sex represented a departure from earlier generations' concerns about male succession.<sup>65</sup> However, feelings were mixed.

Jack Shotton, who was unloading coal by the River Thames in London when he was told that his son David had been born in Newcastle, was much keener on preserving the 'family line'.<sup>66</sup> Norman Livingstone was further afield still when Stephen was born. It was his father who broke the news via telegram to Norman, who was on duty with the Merchant Navy in New York. Originally having drafted a lengthy message, on finding out the price per word, he edited the contents down to the more succinct 'Boy, both well'.<sup>67</sup> For Henry Curd, whose wife, Elsie, had to stay in hospital for six weeks with an infection after Roger was born, a regular a 30-mile cycling round-trip ensued: 'Oh yes, I cycled from Carshalton to Kennington, do a day's work, cycle to Epsom Hospital, go back to Carshalton, cook me dinner, go to bed'.<sup>68</sup> The event of the birth of a child customarily entered family folklore; but father's memories tended to alight on the physical distance between them and their wife and new-born, rather than their intimate engagement with the experience itself.

A minority of men made efforts to be at the birth, as far as their circumstances would allow. Alan Birchwood was proud to be present at three out of four of his children's births, which were all at home.<sup>69</sup> A father from Julia Brannen's oral history study was regretful that he had not done more to ensure he had participated in his first son's birth in the mid-1960s:

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<sup>64</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>65</sup> Fisher, *Fathercraft*, p. 457. It was a concern of the inter-war fathercraft movement that men favoured boys. One address asked rhetorically, "If it be a girl, will you wash your hands of her and leave all that business to her mother?"

<sup>66</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*.

<sup>67</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>68</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>69</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

You know as the father, I wasn't allowed to go in. It was almost... I was treated not very well actually. It was quite bad, almost as if I was a nuisance really, and I don't think I was assertive enough to do anything about it. I think... given a few more years I would have actually been a bit more assertive about that. But I wasn't anyway, and so I was resentful which was a bit silly really.<sup>70</sup>

For the arrival of his second son in 1967, he was more insistent. He delivered him personally, at home, aided by a midwife and the skills he had acquired on a St John's ambulance course. However, fatherly presence during childbirth was more common among the generation of sons, most of whose wives gave birth in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>71</sup> Arthur Winn and his wife, Pat, were able to laugh about the circumstances of their daughter's birth, during which it transpired that Arthur worked with the midwife's husband. They promptly struck up a conversation, momentarily overlooking Pat's rather more urgent predicament.<sup>72</sup> Martin Curd was also present at his children's births, which, as he explained, were profoundly moving experiences:

I actually saw the whole lot. I thought it would make me feel bad, but it didn't. It's the nearest a man can get to actually having a baby, actually being there. And when they're actually born you see the head pop out, and it's something I'll never forget. These people say oh, I couldn't be there. I think it makes you closer to the family.<sup>73</sup>

Nonetheless, as Brian Jackson argued in his 1984 study, most 1980s fathers remained bound by pressures to conform to a masculine identity oriented around ideas of machismo, the ongoing exclusionary forces of medicalization, and 'most obvious, if not most deep and subtle... the imperatives of work'.<sup>74</sup> Jackson described new fathers as 'like puzzled explorers entering a new landscape worried about their supply lines but tempted by the next range of peaks'.<sup>75</sup> The newness of the landscape did not only refer to the fact that it was the first time the men had experienced it, but also because of possibilities for emotional engagement were unrecognisable in their own fathers and

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<sup>70</sup> SN: 7017 Interview 081, Julia Brannen, Ann Mooney and Valerie Wigfall, (2013) *UK Data Service*.

<sup>71</sup> This is reflected in Davis and King's research too. Davis and King, *Gendered Perspectives*, pp. 81-83.

<sup>72</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 160, Thompson and Newby, (1986) *UK Data Service*.

<sup>73</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>74</sup> Jackson, *Fatherhood*, p. 112.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

grandfathers.<sup>76</sup> However, such feelings, according to Jackson were as quickly proscribed in the 1980s as they had been for earlier generations by the temporal and cultural demands of male breadwinning.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than forging close emotional connections from the outset, most father-son relationships grew more intimate as children got older. Their shape carried latent associations of 'breeching', the rite of passage which had for centuries marked the point at which boys first wore breeches (trousers), signalling their suitability for paternal nurturance.<sup>77</sup> There were anthropological underpinnings to this understanding, which held that children instinctively know their mothers but have to grow to know their fathers.<sup>78</sup> It was also commensurate with attachment theory; in 1953, Bowlby suggested that '[a father's] value increases only as the child becomes more able to stand alone'.<sup>79</sup> It was only as infants grew into children that he thought fathers should become involved, and only then, to introduce them to the public world beyond the domestic space.<sup>80</sup> In upper-middle-class families where outsourced childcare and boarding school education had disrupted filial relationships, the pattern was exaggerated. Charlie Henry betrayed an underlying truth about his relationship with Norman when he joked, 'I met my father when I was 14'.<sup>81</sup> Across all social classes, men's absence at work for large part of infants' waking hours provided suitable conditions for this pattern to be reproduced; although, as we shall see in Chapter Five, nor did opportunities for day-to-day engagements necessarily increase as their children got older. Meanwhile, from the son's perspective, as he grew old enough to forge early friendships, he was more inclined to spend time with peers than with family. As Jack Shotton explained of his son David: 'by the time I got back from work, he'd been in from school and back out to play'.<sup>82</sup>

The filial engagements that emerged from the temporally and culturally restrictive amount of time fathers spent with their sons were patchy. Moments of

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<sup>76</sup> See also Lewis, *Becoming a Father*, pp. 169-171.

<sup>77</sup> Davidoff, *Family Story*, p. 91; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>78</sup> The anthropological routes of this belief are traced to Margaret Mead. See Jackson, *Fatherhood*, p. 101.

<sup>79</sup> Bowlby, *Child Care*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16; Winnicott, *The Child*, p. 190.

<sup>81</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>82</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*.

closeness and distance drew on established modes of masculine identity and the particular nature of each relationship. As King illustrated, men who pushed prams in mid-twentieth century Britain might confine their involvement to pushing up hills or around corners.<sup>83</sup> Mothers were still required for the less arduous stretches, while fathers' contributions remained bound by traditionally masculine performances of strength and chivalry. Similarly, as we saw in Chapter One, Alan Birchwood's urge to shield his family from the rain using a sheet of polythene while on holiday symbolised a fatherly devotion that also conformed to an ideal of masculine protection.<sup>84</sup> In another Birchwood anecdote, Alan remembered dealing with their central heating during a particularly cold winter:

We nearly ran out of oil. And er... I hadn't got the, those benches over the radiators then. And Tim came down and he got too near and he burnt his tum on the fittings of the radiator... Anyway, I came back lunchtime, tried to get the boiler going, got about that much oil in, which in fact turned out, because of the temperature, the oil had got very thick indeed and was beginning to precipitate was, which had blocked the filter.<sup>85</sup>

Amid Alan's concern with describing the technicalities of their home's heating system, he also remembered Mark burning his 'tum' on the radiator. The tenderness shown in his abbreviation of 'tummy' belied a touching sense of physical intimacy with his son. As Strange illustrated, in the nineteenth century, children would sit on their fathers' laps and tug their beards when they came home from work.<sup>86</sup> Alan Birchwood's memory illustrates how embodied feelings of tactility and emotional closeness have remained permissible acceptable fatherly behaviour a century later. Also in common with nineteenth century accounts, Alan's anecdote reminds us that such feelings and behaviours were embedded in cultures of work (Alan 'came back at lunchtime'), practical knowledge and skill.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> King, *'Now you see a great many men pushing their pram proudly'*, p. 609.

<sup>84</sup> Chapter One, p. 65.

<sup>85</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

<sup>86</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 162.

<sup>87</sup> The relationship between work, practical skill and father-son relationships is explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

Norman Livingstone acutely felt the need to reconcile the demands of work and the yearning for a close relationship with his son. As he had been when David was born, during David's early years, Norman was in the Merchant Navy; however, he was pleased when he approached the age of 26, in 1960, because the milestone meant that it was no longer necessary for him to be away at sea.

It got more and more difficult to go away quite honestly. Because when I came home, he didn't know me. And you spent two weeks getting to bond and then you were away again for two months, and then you were back again and you went through the rigmarole again – because Steve was a sensitive little child, let's say... [addressing Stephen] I'd come off the train at [Newcastle] Central Station and mum would be waiting with you... and you wouldn't come to me, because I was something out of the blue sort of thing, you know. But after a little while you did no problem, but you had to go through that period.<sup>88</sup>

Their relationship grew closer once Norman had returned to work in Newcastle, but Stephen still remembered 'being brought up by me mum'.<sup>89</sup> For Mike Saddington, also in the Merchant Navy during his son's infancy, the early years of parenthood represented a particularly challenging time. David's first few years of life were spent in various locations, which were determined by Mike's unpredictable postings. One move took the family from the southwest of England, to Scotland, as Mike explained:

I got posted to erm Abbotsinch, Renfrew, Paisley, near Glasgow. It was hopeless... No-one would take you if you had kids. But eventually I did manage to get a place in Glasgow... it was a rough area... and... the tall tenement buildings... and we had a room and a kitchen and a toilet. It was 62 stairs up – how does he remember that? – Well in the morning I used to take the ashes down, and put them in the bin, and come back up... and then I'd have my breakfast. We had the pram of course by this time, with the baby... then we would hump the pram down, in the close at the bottom. And you couldn't leave it there through the night 'cause the kids used to take the wing-nuts off the hood. And then I had to come down on my bike and cycle along Dumbarton Road, get the ferry across to Renfrew and then cycle the odd mile or whatever it was to the camp.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

From Glasgow, Mike was posted to Malta, but in the interim period he was required to spend a few weeks at his port division in Lee-on-Solent, on the south coast, at the other end of the country from his young family. Returning home at weekends, he was to have a blunt but decisive impact on the infant care of his son:

I had very little to do with David at that time ... I used to go home on the odd weekend you know, and I used to wake up, and apparently through the night, David used to wake up. And if she didn't feed him he... you know, she was trying to get... you know you've got to get them in routines and things... anyway, David, he used to howl if she didn't take him into bed. And if she didn't pick him up... her mother used to come up and say, you know... and when I used to go on leave he used to wake up through the night and see this bloke in bed with his mother, and he wasn't at all taken with me... but I only used to see him occasionally you see... and anyway... the relationship with David wasn't very good, but when we got this place in Glasgow with all the stairs... I said – he can cry. And for three nights solid he cried and cried and she was crying... and I was foaming you know... anyway, we finally beat it like, you know, and he slept through. And it was hard work but it was well worth doing, I tell you that.<sup>91</sup>

Mike's account illustrates how couples improvised strategies for parenting according to their circumstances. It reminds us that, for many couples, post-war housing remained by no means conducive to young families' quality of life and that child-rearing practices had to coexist with the routines of fathers' work.

Gender-appropriate interactions with the pram were subordinated to the collective effort required to 'hump' it down 62 stairs. Mike's decisive intervention in the management of David's sleep was more reflective of his exasperation than of a conscious parenting strategy. His experience appears more fraught than Norman Livingstone's, who had been able to work locally and settle into a comfortable house at an earlier stage in his son's life; but both men's lives were structured around the competing demands of work and family life.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Gender Roles in the Parenting of Young Children

We saw in the last chapter how most of the families interviewed arrived at a mutually tolerable, often agreeable, division of household labour. When it came to caring for babies and young children, some fathers offered particularly impassioned defences of male breadwinning and female homemaking, which were, in turn, reaffirmed retrospectively by sons. Furthermore, such stances were taken by otherwise emotionally engaged fathers as well as by distant ones. While Alan Birchwood's presence at three of his children's births was consistent with his impression as a tactile, loving and attentive father, he nevertheless drew the line at changing nappies. Accordingly, his son Mark recalled a clear breadwinner-homemaker division between his parents.<sup>92</sup> The father, mentioned earlier, who was determined to have his second child at home so he could deliver it personally, also held otherwise unreformed views:

I had a viewpoint that men should be the breadwinners and women should be the workers in the home. Now my views have obviously changed a lot since I've got older and [inaudible] realise that that's [inaudible]. But at that time, I did very much have that view and I think that permeated into our marriage<sup>93</sup>

When Harry Tillett's wife was asked if she had wanted to work, she described the way Harry intervened: 'He said – no – when I had Stephen. I said to him – when he goes to school, I'm going to work. And he says – you're bloody not!'.<sup>94</sup> Such views are a powerful reminder of continuities of feeling from earlier generations: of pride in male breadwinning, masculine shame associated with the perception of being unable to provide, and unwillingness to acknowledge women's desire to work for reasons of self-fulfilment.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>93</sup> SN: 7017 Interview 081.

<sup>94</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>95</sup> On the tensions surrounding the preservation of male breadwinning against the growing recognition of women's desires to work for reasons of self-fulfilment, see, for example Brooke, *Gender and Working Class*; Helen McCarthy, 'Social Science and Married Women's Employment in post-war Britain' in *Past & Present*, 233 (2016); McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*; Wilson, *The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*.



These generational continuities were also expressed from earlier generations, in which some post-war grandfathers would intervene in their children's conjugal decisions. Elsie Curd's father disapproved of her working after marrying, insisting that 'the woman's place was in the home'.<sup>96</sup> Sidney Sorrell's father, whose wife had left domestic service after they had got married thought likewise: 'Your place is here... in the home... look after the children'.<sup>97</sup> Channeling his father's attitudes, Alan did not approve of his wife going back to factory work because his job window cleaning was failing to bring in enough money – 'I didn't like the idea of her being down there'.<sup>98</sup> Forced to accept it, however, they solicited the help of his wife's mother to look after the children, rather than take it on himself.<sup>99</sup> As Chris Harris has argued, '... however joint the relationship, however companionable the marriage, however great the sharing, however blurred the boundary demarcating the traditional division of domestic labour, the husband would not be able to replace 'Mum', and... some replacement of 'Mum' was what was required in situations where wives with young children were engaged in full-time work'.<sup>100</sup>

Sons' roles in gendered parenting practices underlined male expectations of female care across generations. Phil Avery's description of his family when he was growing up revealed how a working mother disrupted the stability of normal family life and in turn caused feelings of childhood resentment.

It was an old traditional English household, shall we say. Dad went out and earned the bread; mum stayed at home and made the home... until, we were old enough to be left... and then mum joined the workforce as well. And in fact, she probably – [addressing Fred] 'cause this affected me more than it did you – she probably chose to do it a bit too soon. Because I can remember being on my own, left to my own devices.<sup>101</sup>

As we have seen, Fred and Phil spent most of their childhood acutely conscious of the debt their father had taken on as a result of a series of poor investments.<sup>102</sup> However,

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<sup>96</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>97</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 132.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133; SN: 4938-1 Interview 132.

<sup>100</sup> Harris, *The Family in Post-war Britain*, p. 55.

<sup>101</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>102</sup> Chapter Two, p. 101.

even in retrospect, Phil could not wholly absolve his mother for combining parenting with working. John Taylor shared similar misgivings:

My father obviously worked... my father worked every day, and Saturday mornings, so I, I only really saw him Sundays and sorta' Saturday afternoons, and he probably wouldn't come back from work until I was probably ready for bed, until I was sort of, you know... he didn't... sort of eight or nine... when I was young, I didn't see much of him, I don't suppose. And my mother, er... she was a nurse, and... erm... in hospital... at the time and she was a night nurse, so, during the day, she'd have to sleep and I'd have to be very quiet and not wake her up.<sup>103</sup>

In the Taylor family, like many others, children of working mothers did not find their fathers in a position to compensate. Although sons, such as Alan Sorrell, formed an attachment to his grandmother in lieu of his mother, others, like John Taylor, experienced a more acute sense of absence. John had mixed experiences with a variety of aunts, uncles and grandparents to whom he was sent as part of a childcare rota to dovetail with his mother's working hours.

Post-war Moral panics surrounding 'latchkey children' and juvenile delinquency helped reinforce the social stigma of mothers working when their children were still young.<sup>104</sup> It is difficult to get a sense from father-son sources the extent to which the mothers in their families felt such pressures; however, what Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has described as the 'dual pattern' of 'full-time housewifery and caring for young children' aptly described the vast majority of their experiences.<sup>105</sup> Andrew Coverley's account of his mother's decision not to return to work until she was satisfied of her children's independence was typical:

She was a magistrate whilst I was at school. Again, once we were all well into secondary education and she felt that it was time... she would not harm our upbringing for her to

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<sup>103</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

<sup>104</sup> Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, p. 210; Kathrine Holden 'Family, Caring and Unpaid Work' in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed) *Women in 20th Century Britain: Economic, Social & Cultural Change* (Longman, 2001), p. 140.

<sup>105</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Housewifery*, p. 158.

do anything... and she didn't do much in this at all when we were young. She was definitely there at all times.<sup>106</sup>

As we have seen, many post-war women drew strength, self-confidence and self-respect from their oversight of housework and childcare.<sup>107</sup> Even men who did take more active roles in childcare accepted that overall responsibility remained with their wives. As we saw in Chapter One, Peter Wilkins enjoyed many intimate moments with his young children on his farm. He had also been 'quite happy' to help out with feeding and bathing them as infants (he had learned the skills in childhood, helping his mother raise his three younger siblings). But he was neither involved in decision-making nor the overall direction of care, as he explained 'I didn't know too much about it'.<sup>108</sup> In 1950s Oxford, John Mogey observed that men accepted 'a place just outside the more intense mother-children relations';<sup>109</sup> Mogey cites a woman who remarked: 'My husband says when the children ask him for anything, "Well ask your Mum: if she says Yes, well I suppose it's all right", so I suppose I'm the boss'.<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Bott found that families who had loose-knit social networks were most likely to include a father who was engaged in infant care at some level, but even in such families, 'at most he could be an auxiliary mother, and if he tried to be more the wife felt he was poaching on her territory'.<sup>111</sup> The 1970s and beyond would see a reassessment of the gendered order of childcare responsibility on a larger scale; however in the 1950s and 1960s, the mutual recognition of domestic gender roles remained relatively static.

The extent to which sons' attitudes towards their new family structures, a generation later, represented continuations from those of their fathers and grandfathers was also striking. Outsourced childcare was a common focal point for their disapproval, suggesting views which sustained Bowlbyist ideas about privileging the mother-child bond above all others. Martin Curd, whose first child was born in 1971, changed nappies, and washed and dressed his young children, but insisted:

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<sup>106</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>107</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 40; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Housewifery*, pp. 151-152. They each critique Oakley, *Housewife*.

<sup>108</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>109</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 61.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>111</sup> Bott, *Family and Social Network*, p. 80.

I didn't want [my wife] to work. I feel that when you've got a family they should be at home, 'specially when they're very small. 'Cos things can go wrong, I don't believe in all this leaving 'em. 'Cos when they're little, I think it's the best time of their lives. I know people have gotta work, but when they farm out to these other people all day long, the kids never get to know their mums.<sup>112</sup>

Despite having had a close relationship with his grandmother, who was his primary care-giver for much of his childhood, Alan Sorrell, felt strongly that no-one other than a child's parents should look after them, even for an evening. Equally, there was no question that it was to be his wife who would shoulder the majority of the childcare labour; she gave up work in pregnancy, not returning until their daughter was 11.<sup>113</sup> For David Shotton, speaking in 2016, the growth of outsourced childcare was symptomatic of the way society has changed for the worse since he was child. As he explained, 'you should do these things yourself'.<sup>114</sup> The gendering of early years parenting profoundly informed fathers and sons' experiences of family life, in which female childcare remained stubbornly normative for the generation growing up after the war. Sons' adult perspectives extending well into the twenty-first century only confirm the salience of the gender ordering of parenting in the intergenerational transmission of male attitudes and behaviours.

#### **4. Collective Parenting: Intergenerational Transmissions of Values, Attitudes and Behaviours**

Where details about care of infants and young children is difficult to trace in the testimonies of most fathers, information about parenting older children and adolescents is easier to find. As children grew into social actors, with wider repertoires of relationships and behaviours more akin to adults, fathers felt better able to have a greater range of engagements with them. However, this did not represent a gradual transfer of a child's relationship from the mother to the father; rather, parental strategies and approaches for children and adolescents were more likely to be arrived

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<sup>112</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>113</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>114</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*.

at collectively. Just as mothers had drawn selectively on advice from experts, kin, friends and their own instincts when parenting their babies and infants, there was no particular strategy adopted by mothers and fathers in the parenting of older children.

As Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi have described with regard to the transmission of moral judgment from parents to children, it was 'less the imposition of a moral code and more the expression of patchy and incoherent ideas about what is – and is not – appropriate parenthood'.<sup>115</sup> The only concession to semi-formal moral guidance came in the form of Sunday Schools, which most of the sons interviewed attended. As Doreen Rosman has argued, Sunday Schools satisfied the instinct among parents – generally mothers – for their children to receive religious-moral instruction, while simultaneously absolving themselves of any need to go to church.<sup>116</sup> What emerges most strongly from the interviews is consciousness of intergenerational inheritances – which were often reproduced, sometimes rejected: concern for manners and respectfulness, and, as we shall discuss in more detail in Chapter Five, the inculcation of a strong worth ethic. These transmissions were negotiated subjectively, according to individual family circumstances, but in all instances, mothers still retained the leading role.

We saw in the last chapter how Andrew Coverley and Mark Birchwood inherited social values drawn from their family's middle-class cultural sensibilities. Both Andrew and Mark afforded notable significance to their parents' particular customs and values, in particular relating to associational life and social egalitarianism. The belief in the universal applicability of their families' ways of doing things extended to their experience of parenting. Andrew, one of four siblings, recalled fondly how they would all be put to bed at the same time, receiving one sweet each providing they ate a piece of fruit.<sup>117</sup> Likewise, they all participated in a washing-up rota. Mark Birchwood remembered his parents' 'open door' policy, which meant Mark's friends – as well as a variety of house guests – were always welcome to stay. He reflected that the policy

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<sup>115</sup> Pooley and Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>116</sup> Doreen Rosman, 'Sunday Schools and Social Change in the Twentieth Century' in Stephen Orchard and John Briggs (eds) *The Sunday School Movement: Studies in the Growth and Decline of Sunday Schools* (Paternoster, 2007), pp. 152-159. In the 1950s, nearly half of all children were on Sunday School registers. By 1989, the figure was just 7%.

<sup>117</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

exemplified his father's patience and kindness, which were values that remained powerfully influential on Mark well into adulthood.<sup>118</sup> The pronominal expressions in the Coverleys' and Birchwoods' testimonies underlined the way certain parenting decisions were made jointly. As we saw in Chapter One, it was the family 'we' who bought Action Man clothes for Mark Birchwood's toy Brains from Thunderbirds and advised him on A-Level options.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, in Peter Coverley's testimony, he recalled 'I think we both took the attitude that preaching at them and using the heavy hand was a bit stupid - that it would be counter-productive'.<sup>120</sup> However, Peter did go on to explain that he would generally refer to his wife Mary – who had a 'tremendous way with her' – on matters do with their children's upbringing.<sup>121</sup>

Mealtimes provided apt opportunities for parents and children to convene as families, during which ideas about suitable attitudes and behaviours to be put into practice. The positioning of arms and the particular uses of knives and forks provided straightforward and accessible subjects about which rules could be set. Both the guidance and the strictness with which they were enforced varied; however, good table manners were representative of a wider set of behaviours, encompassing obedience and respectfulness, which applied to families from all social backgrounds. Asked if his children were required to hold a knife and fork in a certain way, Henry Curd replied 'Table manners, yes. Definitely, yes.'<sup>122</sup> In turn, commenting on his own parenting approach as an adult, Henry's son Martin said he 'make(s) sure they're well behaved. Table manners and all this sorta' thing. To say please and thank you.'<sup>123</sup> Arthur Winn, born in 1942, enjoyed his parents' choice of phrase forbidding elbows from the table so much, he continued to use it on his own children: 'Very, very important. Not allowed. 'All uncooked joints off the table'.<sup>124</sup> Just as importantly, in a move that again crossed classes, most fathers and sons remembered that mealtimes were opportunities for intergenerational conversation. As Steve Tillett explained, it was...

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<sup>118</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>119</sup> Chapter One, p. 64.

<sup>120</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>123</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>124</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 160.

...not like the Victorian times. Well, the impression I've got where the head of the family, he's the man, you know, and the kids are not to be seen or heard. I mean, it wasn't like that. Obviously, kids weren't supposed to be naughty which is just common-sense anyway. Yeah, oh yeah, I mean, dad would ask me what I was up to at school, you know, and what sort of homework I'd got and this, that and the other. Generally, what I'd been doing.<sup>125</sup>

In this respect, mealtimes were conspicuous for their allusions to post-war child-centred philosophies.<sup>126</sup> As we shall see, they also anticipated parents' aspirations for their children's individual self-fulfilment as older children and adolescents.

For many parents, mealtimes were also rehearsals in the family home for appropriate behaviour when at other people's houses. In this respect, table manners were quintessential markers of respectability, which had as much to do with dynamics within a family as with the presentation of a family beyond the home. Inclusive family conversational practices, which were perceived to have marked a departure from earlier ones, were permitted only in conjunction with good manners, which transcended at least four generations, from parents' parents to the children of post-war sons. Recalling her inter-war childhood, Harry Tillett's wife commented:

I can remember as a young girl seeing kids in the street squealing and I used to think if they were mine. I'd never let mine do that - and things - just behaviour. You've gotta have good manners. I remember how rough we were and we got nothing, but we always had good manners and behaved yourself.<sup>127</sup>

Accordingly, of her own children, she was proud to assert that 'I'd take 'em out and people'd say well, you can take your kids anywhere. They're good children, so that's it. They're good mannered - well mannered, the pair of 'em, you know'.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Henry Curd recalled that as a child, the mealtime rules were: 'Elbows off the table, don't sit at

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<sup>125</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 141.

<sup>126</sup> Newson and Newson, *Four Years Old*, pp. 235-241. Newson and Newson reported that most parents were pleased to be living under material and cultural conditions which allowed for a greater focus on their children.

<sup>127</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

the table with your forks in the air. Mind your p's and q's, and behave yourself when you're out, and be polite to people'.<sup>129</sup> Parenting his own children, he remembered:

Oh manners, yeah. There was a thing that, we used to think that sometimes they were little so and so's, but if they went to a party, people used to say – aren't they nice young gentlemen, behave themselves. I suppose you keep on to them about manners and it does sort of go in.<sup>130</sup>

A generation later, his daughter-in-law confirmed that holding knives and forks properly was important because, 'if you teach them what you feel is correct and acceptable, then at least you know when they go to other people's houses or out, then you haven't got to worry that everybody's going to be looking at them and saying – oh, look at her. Really, more for them.'<sup>131</sup> Arthur Winn's wife, whose parents-in-law had the rule about 'uncooked joints', agreed: 'Well, I think they should show respect to other people – good manners and honesty. I don't mind how naughty they are here as long as they go out and they know how to behave and how to act with other people.'<sup>132</sup> The inclusion of Arthur Winn's wife in this intergenerational transmission linking ideas about manners with respectability underlines the fact that concerns about good impressions emerged more among parents from working-class backgrounds. Nonetheless, the importance of manners in isolation cut across classes and generations. As such they represent a distinctive note of continuity amid the shifting associations of social identity discussed in Chapter Two.

## **5. Discipline and Punishment**

Along with manners, approaches to discipline and punishment were among some of the most salient memories of post-war experiences, which also transcended social class. A particularly chilling piece of oral history testimony from Elizabeth Roberts's investigation into women and families between 1940 and 1970 is often quoted to sum up the post-war shift towards less severe methods of discipline and

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<sup>129</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>132</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 160,(1986)



punishment: when it was suggested to a respondent that her advocacy of smacking represented a continuation from her experience as a child in the 1930s, she replied, 'No, I'd been beaten, there's a hell of a difference. I would never get too... I never did to my children the way I was beaten'.<sup>133</sup> Before the Second World War, it was not uncommon to find in homes the looming threat of a cane hanging above the fireplace; such practices were legacies of Victorian evangelical Christian notions of breaking the will of sinful children.<sup>134</sup> By the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of the strict Victorian disciplinarian father was more caricature than reality. As Laura King has suggested, the image of the post-war 'modern father' was more likely to evoke companionship and compassion.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, pre-war childhood corporal punishment could still loom large in memories of post-war parents, even if they did elect to adopt less punitive regimes. Moreover, as Deborah Thom has argued, parental discipline over the twentieth century has a complicated chronology. There was progressive inter-war advice that denounced corporal punishment as self-defeating, while the 1950s and 1960s saw revivals of British imperial and American military discourse advocating strict regimes of discipline.<sup>136</sup> Nonetheless, most sources of lived experiences agree that where physical punishment did continue, it was less likely in the post-war period to have involved instruments, such as the cane, slipper or birch.<sup>137</sup>

Responsibility for discipline and punishment most often remained with mothers, in accordance with their roles as chief directors of parenting strategies. The clichéd chastisement 'wait 'til your father gets home' doubtless formed part of mothers' repertoires of methods to deal with children's transgressions. However, it remained most effective as a threat to curb behaviour in the short-term rather than a genuine promise of severe paternal retribution.<sup>138</sup> More significant was the assumption the phrase carried of fatherly absence. Most of the time that children's behaviour required supervision, their fathers were away at work. Asked about who would punish him if he was naughty, David Shotton replied, 'Me mam, me mam would do it, because she was

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<sup>133</sup> Quoted in, for example, King, *Family Men*, p. 73; Thom, "Beating Children is Wrong", p. 278.

<sup>134</sup> Humphries and Gordon, *Labour of Love* p. 86.

<sup>135</sup> See, for example, King, *Family Men*, pp. 180-184.

<sup>136</sup> Thom, "Beating Children is Wrong", pp. 269, 278. .

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278. Thom reports that of the 2,000 National Archive life histories, 156 reported corporal punishment in schools, but very few at home after the 1960s.

<sup>138</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 75-76.

around more.’<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Stephen Laws explained ‘Mother controlled all of those things. Discipline, pretty well all the rules. [addressing his father] You were in many respects quite passive. [laughter]’<sup>140</sup> David Saddington summed up a typical experience in response to a question about who was responsible for discipline: ‘Well, my dad was working a lot of the time, so predominantly my mother. And occasionally, you know, she’d say “wait ‘til your dad gets in” type of thing – you know classic stuff – but predominantly me mother, because, like I say I didn’t see a lot of my dad for long periods of time.’<sup>141</sup> Nonetheless, several sons confirmed that on the occasions fathers were called upon, the severity of the admonishment – occasionally physical, but not often – was more likely to stick in the mind.

Within the broad pattern of female oversight, the nature of the gendered parental discipline was mixed. In mid-1950s Oxford, John Moge found that many women smacked their children, while their husbands were the ‘final court of appeal’.<sup>142</sup> However, in London at the same time, Elizabeth Bott concluded that ‘couples did not feel that fathers should be the final authorities and disciplinarians and that mother should be more warm-hearted. They thought husband and wife should be more or less equal both in authority and in warm-heartedness’.<sup>143</sup> The contrasting accounts reflect the plurality of post-war experiences of parenting for men and women invoking elements of behaviourist and child-centred strategies in dialogue with each other and with the social markers provided by kin and friends. Certainly, Mark Birchwood’s experience corresponded with Bott’s analysis. He struggled to answer a question about his father’s approach: ‘He must have got cross occasionally, but very, very rarely. Wow, yeah, never thought about it’.<sup>144</sup> Mark was the recipient of what his father Alan described as an ‘elastic’ approach to discipline, arrived at jointly with his wife, in which ‘it was no good having rigid boundaries, you had to make it give, in various directions as they became reasonable enough to realise what they were doing’.<sup>145</sup> As King has argued, the experience of post-war fatherly authority was ambivalent. Men were required on

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<sup>139</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*.

<sup>140</sup> ELL10, *Arthur and Stephen Laws*.

<sup>141</sup> ELL11, *David Saddington* *ibid*.

<sup>142</sup> Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>143</sup> Bott, *Family and Social Network* p. 80.

<sup>144</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>145</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

one hand to assert their presence as parents amid press coverage linking absent fathers to instances of juvenile delinquency; and on the other, subscribe to the less disciplinarian model increasingly advocated in discourses of modern parenting.<sup>146</sup>

Reflected upon in oral history interviews, men showed how discourses of nostalgia and regret interacted with the psychic process of composure to inform the reproduction of sometimes difficult memories. The Birchwoods' joint, 'elastic' approach to parental discipline represented a continuation of Alan's childhood experience, in which his parents had been similarly non-dogmatic. At first, it appeared that Bill Taylor, who was born in 1926, had in mind a similar process of intergenerational transmission. Comparing the 'close' relationship he had with his children with the one he had with his father as a child, Bill reflected, 'I suppose it... it just carried on sorta thing, because he was always good to us... I can never remember getting hit by him.'<sup>147</sup> But, as we have seen, the extent to which being 'good to us' was 'carried on' is contested in Bill's son John's memories of his childhood relationship with his father.<sup>148</sup> Asked if thought of his Bill as an 'authority figure', John replied:

John: He, he, he wasn't, he wasn't a Dickensian father... and he isn't a Dickensian father now. And when you interview him, he might have a completely different take on it... but, at the time, y'know [pause]... I'm not saying I was frightened of my father, but I was certainly frightened of getting a smack... if I... did something wrong, so I didn't do things wrong.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So, it was the threat...

John: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...more than the actual...

John: Yeah, and the occasional actual! [both laugh]<sup>149</sup>

John's fearfulness extended to social relations beyond the family too:

John: I was always terrified of, of, getting the homework wrong, or not being able to hand it... not being able to finish in time. So, er, ... used to take it

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<sup>146</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 63-77.

<sup>147</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>148</sup> Chapter One, pp. 63-64; Chapter Two, pp. 83-84.

<sup>149</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

seriously in those days.... I've always been terrified of authority [big laugh]

Interviewer: Have you? That's a...

John: No, I'm making it up ... I'm not now. [pause] But y'know, in those, in those days... yeah, I think er definitely... the relationship between the teachers and the par... and the children... and, the, by... therefore between the school and the pupils as a whole... it was much more formal and authoritarian and you didn't cross boundaries.<sup>150</sup>

Just as he had in relation to family holidays, John processed his personal, traumatic feelings with recourse to imagined wider social worlds.<sup>151</sup>

John's testimony about fearfulness of authority within and beyond the home bears comparison with his father's account of childhood experiences of paternal corporal punishment in the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, his anecdote about the 'Saturday penny', which he insisted was entirely commensurate with his father having been 'good to us'.

Bill: That's, that's a lil' thing actually, 'cause you talk about my parents... 'cause the parents were very strict in them days, y'know, I mean... at school it was very strict... you got the cane for anything, y'know. But, my mum an... used to have a cane... used to hang up on the side of the fireplace.

Interviewer: Your dad?

Bill: Yeah, my parents... but my mother used to make me... and we used to get what you'd call a 'Saturday penny'. When he got his wages on a Friday he used to give us a penny out of his wages. The old pennies, y'know. And if the old cane it got a bit frayed, he used to say "go down, buy yourself a cane". And like good'uns, we used to go down, and the canes used to be ha'penny. Half a p. And you could buy a liquorice... a liquorice hardstick for half a penny. So we used to go down... 'n' – I'll have a cane Mr Thatcher, I'll have a cane please and a hardstick for a penny. And we'd bring the cane back, and hang it on the side of the hook and

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<sup>150</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>151</sup> Chapter One, p. 66.

throw the old one away. So they used to have the cane and they used to chase us around the room with the cane, y'know.

Interviewer: That you'd bought?

Bill: Well if you played up at all, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Bill: Yeah. But it didn't do us any harm.

Interviewer: No.

Bill: I mean... a lot kids 'do with the cane nowadays! [Bill and Edith laugh]<sup>152</sup>

The fraying of the cane confirms that it was in regular use, and the entry of the 'Saturday penny' into the family's traditions and vernacular reinforces the familiarity of the practice. The bitter-sweet reward of receiving a liquorice hardstick to accompany the replacement cane might be suggestive of grim acceptance on behalf of Bill and his brothers; but that is not how it is portrayed. Rather, Bill recounts the story approvingly, confirming that children 'nowadays' might benefit from similar treatment.

Bill and John present complicated and contested accounts of authority, discipline and punishment in the Taylor family across generations. To help interpret them, it is useful to reflect on processes of 'composure' in oral history interviews. Alistair Thomson describes the double-meaning of composure in terms of how 'in one sense we 'compose' or construct memories using the public language and meanings of our culture ... [and] in another sense we 'compose' memories which help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives'.<sup>153</sup> As Graham Dawson has illustrated, in arriving at composure in these terms, we work through, contain and repress any troubling aspects of our experience.<sup>154</sup> Correspondingly, as Penny Summerfield has argued, *discomposure* may 'arise from the difficulties for a narrator of selecting from the discursive repertoire a set of concepts and definitions which allows them psychic comfort when telling their pasts'.<sup>155</sup> Bill draws successfully on cultural motifs, such as the strict school, the penny and the liquorice hardstick to compose his memory; he also gains composure by

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<sup>152</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>153</sup> Alistair Thomson (1991) 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia' in Thomson and Perks (eds) *Oral History Reader*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>154</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, p. 22.

<sup>155</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History' in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (eds) *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories and Methods* (Routledge, 2000), p. 104.

inserting of comic elements ('and like good'uns, we used to go down'). These receive a positive reception from his audience: the interviewer (myself) and his wife Edith. Edith nods and smiles throughout, suggesting that this story has had many previous outings and affirmative receptions. John also draws on culture in his testimony, using the extreme archetype of the Dickensian authoritarian father, or the imagined 'formal' culture of the 1960s, to deescalate his own trauma. However, his deployment of these 'discursive scripts' is less successful. Where Bill's use of humour underlies his composure, John's laughter is spontaneous and nervous, betraying discomposure at recalling a memory that still causes him unease.

Bill's and John's divergent accounts of the same family dynamic thus reveal contrasting emotional subjectivities, which were further underlined in their respective uses of pronouns. John says '*I* was certainly frightened of getting a smack... so *I* didn't do things wrong', whereas for Bill, it was '*we*' that 'used to get what you'd call a 'Saturday penny', and 'they used to chase *us* around the room with the cane'. Both Bill and John had three brothers that were not particularly close in age; however, where John's brothers barely feature in his account, Bill's are the source of vital sibling solidarity in response to the 'Saturday penny' ritual. Comparison of these different accounts of parental discipline in the same family complicates a teleological narrative of diminishing severity of punishment across the mid-twentieth century. Bill may have experienced more beatings, but his son, a generation later, felt more fearful. Both father and son draw on historic cultural norms positioned as more authoritarian than the moment of interviewing, but their negotiations of them produce quite contrasting psychic outcomes.

The success with which Bill had assimilated his account of childhood discipline into a narrative of nostalgia was a particular feature of Bill's testimony. It was 'kids nowadays' who could benefit from the cane, as he had benefitted two generations earlier. Fred Avery – a generation older than Bill – presented a comparably nostalgic perspective in similarly humorous terms.

I did something one day, I don't know what it was... but my dad... we had a triangular rose garden... and it was as big as this room... and I did something wrong, and dad came

out at me, and he was going to hit me, you know, because they used to smack you in those days, you know... don't matter where... And suddenly, oh... the air turned blue and he started chasing me round this bloody rose garden! And we did about four circuits of this rose garden [Fred and Phil laugh]... You couldn't dive through the bushes, 'cause they were prickly, you know... [more laughter], and he never did catch me! But of course, when I got back in, I found out what it was all about.<sup>156</sup>

As was the case with Bill Taylor's anecdote, the thrill of the chase provided Fred with a narrative device to make light of his experience, while nonetheless emphasising its inherent tension – the threat of smacking was a grave one ('when I got back in, I found out what it was all about'). Like Bill for the inter-war period, Fred wears his experience of post-war parental corporal punishment as a badge of honour. But when asked if he had in fact been smacked, Fred conceded: 'Well, I think I got a severe talking to. When he'd calmed down and I'd calmed down. You know, it wasn't so bad after all.'<sup>157</sup>

Similarly, when Alan Sorrell was asked what would happen if he did something that his parents did not approve of, he replied 'Well, if they found out, I'd have the strap';<sup>158</sup> but he later admitted 'They never used to hit me ... they never used a strap or anything like that, just threatened'.<sup>159</sup> As both King and Thom have pointed out, the true extent of everyday corporal punishment in the home is difficult to trace because of the unwillingness of parents and children alike to document painful memories. Taken at face value, interviews with fathers and sons in the 1980s and 2010s about their memories of parental corporal punishment in the past suggest that historical practices were more severe. However, expressions of childhood fear, assertions of defiance, and sentiments of approval in relation to present-day circumstances reveal more complex negotiations of emotional experiences over time. A discourse of gradually greater leniency is treated ambivalently, with some men drawing on discourses of nostalgia and others reflecting on more painful memories.

Ambivalence also characterised the testimonies of Norman and Charlie Henry, who were both boarding pupils at public schools during their childhoods, and for whom

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<sup>156</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133,(1986)

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

quite severe corporal punishment was a routine part of school life. Reflecting on their experiences as adults, in one respect, the outsourcing of this aspect of parenting to school was unquestioned as an unavoidable implication of receiving the best possible education; in another, it prompted the revelation of more traumatic memories. During his time at preparatory school (aged 8-13) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Charlie described a particularly aggressive nurse:

She looked about 10-foot tall, but she was probably 6-foot or something. Anyway, she had huge feet and she had Scholl, whatever, clogs, you know the ones I mean? And used to... like a cricket bat, used to beat us with that, and.. and that was a fairly serious [laughs] and looking back... they'd all be in prison now, by today's terms. But in those days, it was normal.<sup>160</sup>

Norman described his own experience at 'prep' school in the 1930s as 'awful – I mean it was run viciously'.<sup>161</sup> Across generations, he described this state of affairs as 'par for the course'.<sup>162</sup> However, his insistence that by the time Charlie went to school the cane was mostly kept 'in the cupboard', as a deterrent, was disputed by Charlie, who remembered being 'beaten to within an inch of your life on a regular basis'.<sup>163</sup> Norman and Charlie's testimony provides another example of intergenerational disagreement about discipline and punishment as children. While both father and son conveyed a grim sense of achievement at having come through their experiences, there was none of the nostalgia that characterised some of the other fathers' and sons' experiences. Corporal punishment was administered in state schools over the mid-twentieth century as well;<sup>164</sup> but it failed to emerge as such a prominent theme in the testimonies of state-educated men, whose experiences of school were less immersive than their boarded-out counterparts. Moreover, for many middle and upper-middle-class families, the outsourcing of discipline to a school mirrored arrangements at home. As Norman described, 'my wife always really had a woman, of sorts. Early on as a nanny or whatever, subsequently as a fairly frequent daily or whatever you like to call it, and a

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<sup>160</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Thom, "*Beating Children is Wrong*", pp. 262-263. Corporal punishment was abolished in state schools in 1986, and in private schools in 1996.



man servant – so she had time to go and play golf, or socialise, if you know what I mean'.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, Charlie recalled that his mother was the guiding force in the strict character of his upbringing. Mindful of his father's army officer career, Charlie joked that he was 'brought up by martial law by my mother, not my father'.<sup>166</sup> Childcare and the enforcement of discipline was no more a father's concern in households with staff than in those without.<sup>167</sup>

## **Conclusion: Reflections on Adult Relationships**

The majority of fathers interviewed drew on present-day perspectives of their relationships with their sons when appraising their experiences of parenthood in the past. As Bill Taylor said proudly, 'a lot of people never see their children, but they all come 'round here'.<sup>168</sup> Norman Henry may have been the only father to have described parenting so explicitly as 'preparing the ground for the future', but the sentiment was implicit in most testimonies.<sup>169</sup> Sons' future lives as adults represented the life-stage at which they, in all expectation, would have joined their fathers as male breadwinners and as social agents with whom they might enjoy more mutually enriching relationships. As Edward Winn remarked, he was now 'on the same level' as his sons, who he could now talk to 'man to man'.<sup>170</sup>

The arrival of grandchildren was another landmark on the family's lifecycle that provided a new focus for empathic interaction between fathers with their adult sons. As we saw in the last chapter, and as will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters, sons' coming-of-age experiences in the decades following the Second World War were characterised by opportunities for self-fulfilment that most fathers had not experienced. From a parenting perspective, such experiences were approached by channeling particular, intersubjective emotional dynamics. However, in most cases, Tim Fisher is right to argue that the inter-war fathercraft movement's advice about

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<sup>165</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 139.

<sup>168</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>169</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>170</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 159, Thompson and Newby, (1986) *UK Data Service*.

recognizing and encouraging individual aptitudes was prescient.<sup>171</sup> Most fathers thought, like Henry Curd did, that their children should 'make up their own minds'; he 'didn't want them to sorta say dad's a socialist, you gotta be a socialist, or, I'm a Catholic or Church of England and they gotta be the same. They have to make up their own minds about these things'.<sup>172</sup> For men such as Norman Henry and Peter Wilkins, this entailed a discontinuance of their own fathers' 'domineering' and 'controlling' attitudes. Others, such as Norman Livingstone and Mike Saddington, arrived at a more liberal mindset in better harmony with their own fathers' inclinations, which their sons, in turn, were glad to inherit.

Whatever fathers' reflections on what had been passed on, or sons' thoughts on what had been inherited, fathers' influence during their children's early years was timebound and secondary to that of their wives and to their obligations of work. Nonetheless, moments of emotional connection amid the detachment confirmed the malleability of adult masculinity to embrace tender, tactile intimacy as well as distance and detachment. While a growing cultural acceptability of attentive, intimate fathers may have emerged amid the demands of full employment and the exclusionary message of childcare advice after the war, such capacious performances of masculinity also had their antecedents in earlier generations.

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<sup>171</sup> Fisher, *Fathercraft*, pp. 457-458.

<sup>172</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

## Chapter Four.

### ‘Education, education, education’

Education was both a universal experience and a profound marker of social change in post-war Britain. Accordingly, its impact on family life and the development of male subjectivities, for fathers as well as sons, was well documented in oral history testimonies. For Peter Wilkins, educational change marked the principal difference between the state of the citizenship in 2016 and when he went to school in the late 1930s and early 1940s:

I think they're better educated now, people... aren't we better educated? Because... when Tony Blair was electioneering... I didn't vote for them then, but I did agree with what he said, can you remember? 'Education, education, education'. I agree with all that, because it should make a better place for all of us, shouldn't it? It doesn't always happen, does it? But... it was his slogan, wasn't it? And I agree with that, wholeheartedly, yes, I did.<sup>1</sup>

Peter recounts a Whiggish narrative of developments in education. He was slightly hesitant – ‘It doesn't always happen, does it?’ – but in general he saw Tony Blair's famous exposition of New Labour's 1996 ‘three priorities for government’ as somehow affirming both a universal truth about the importance of education to society, and an indication that the British have become better educated over the course of his lifetime. Born in 1930, he was one of a generation that were too old to benefit from the reforms outlined in the 1944 Education Act directly, but whose children were among the first to experience the transformed educational landscape it inaugurated.

Peter himself was the recipient of a less well-documented strand of post-war education, attending adult classes in the late 1940s, before experiencing post-war children's education indirectly as a parent of two children. By the time of his interview,

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<sup>1</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*. Peter was quoting from Tony Blair's leader's speech at the 1996 Labour Party conference. See <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=202> [Accessed October 2018]

20 years after Tony Blair's famous pronouncement, nearly half of all school-leavers entered higher education of some description, including Peter's step-grandchildren.<sup>2</sup> This chapter tracks the particular and intersubjective emotional journeys of fathers and sons through the transformative changes of post-war education. So removed were children's post-war experiences from those of their parents, post-war education came to represent a key site of generational change. However, measures of that change moored only to the numbers of children who passed or failed the notorious '11-plus' examination fail to account for the plurality of intergenerational experiences for families across the social and educational spectrum. Where contemporary social research focused on the impact of home lives on educational outcomes, this chapter examines the impact the education system had on families, which were key sites for the mediation of often profoundly new experiences. Focusing on experiences that cut across technical, secondary modern, grammar, comprehensive, private and university educations, this chapter marks a removal from understandings that are predicated solely on categories of educational level and social class. In particular I will highlight the place of fathers and sons' ongoing relationships with each other in their negotiations of post-war education, showing how timebound fatherly investments nonetheless led to intersubjective emotional experiences that reflected the importance of education in narratives of family life.

## **1. Setting the Scene: Post-war Education and Social Change**

The 1944 Education Act (also known as the 'Butler Act', after the Conservative Education Minister, R.A. Butler, who introduced it) abolished fees for state secondary education, raised the school leaving age for all children to 15, and created a clear demarcation between primary and secondary schools at the age of 11.<sup>3</sup> Before the war, children had attended elementary schools until between the ages of 12 and 14, depending on region, with only 15 per cent receiving secondary education beyond that point.<sup>4</sup> The 1944 Act devolved responsibility to Local Education Authorities to provide

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<sup>2</sup> Participation rate was 49% in 2015/16. See 'Participation Rates in Higher Education' SFR47/2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-rates-in-higher-education-2006-to-2016> [Accessed October 2018]

<sup>3</sup> Mandler, *Schools*, p. 8; Education Act 1944 (The National Archives, 1944), II/3, II/8.

<sup>4</sup> Mandler, *Schools*, p. 7; Laura Carter, 'The 'History of Everyday Life' and Democratic Culture in Britain, 1918-1968' (unpublished PhD dissertation, 2018), p. 74.

for all 'ages, abilities and aptitudes'.<sup>5</sup> Most elected to pursue a bipartite system of grammars and secondary modern schools, with a minority sustaining a tripartite system, with the inclusion of technical schools.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Act was delivered idiosyncratically, with the number of grammar school places and the availability of technical schools varying from region to region. In a number of areas, comprehensive schools also existed well before the more widespread turn towards comprehensivisation from the mid-1960s.<sup>7</sup>

Regional differences notwithstanding, selection for pupils via the '11-plus' examination was widespread, with those who passed becoming eligible for a place at a grammar school. At a national level this saw a third of pupils educated in the grammars in the late 1940s, falling to just under a fifth by the mid-1960s, as school populations grew and demand increasingly outstripped supply.<sup>8</sup> Most of the remaining pupils went to secondary moderns, which catered for the majority of secondary education, with technical schools hosting a much smaller number.<sup>9</sup> It was notable that the independent sector remained little changed, having escaped the 1944 reforms largely unscathed, with pupil numbers hovering between five and eight per cent of the total school-age population across the period.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the higher education sector responded to increased demand, albeit belatedly, by greatly expanding the number of institutions offering post-secondary education, particularly from the early 1960s. Participation in higher education rose from three per cent before the war, to 14 per cent by the early 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mandler, *Schools*, p. 8; Education Act 1944, II/8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See Stephanie Spencer, 'Reflections on the 'Site of Struggle': Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s' in *History of Education*, 33 (2004), p. 443; Carter 'The 'History of Everyday Life'.

<sup>8</sup> SESC (2018), 'Secondary Education and Social Change: Grammar Schools', p. 1; Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> See Laura Carter, "'Experimental' Secondary Modern Education in Britain, 1948–1958' in *Cultural and Social History*, 13 (2016), p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Education: Historical Statistics (House of Commons Library, 2012), SN/SG/4252, p. 9. <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN04252#fullreport> [Accessed February 2018]. The figures only increase from five to just over eight per cent in 1963 because of the inclusion of 'direct grant' grammars in the statistics. They then dip to under six per cent by the mid 1970s. On reasons for the failure of proposals to better assimilate state and 'public' schools as part of the 1944 Education Act, see Nicholas Hillman, 'Public Schools and the Fleming Report of 1944: Shunting the First-class Carriage on to an Immense Siding?' in *History of Education*, 41 (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Mandler, 'Educating the Nation II: Universities' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (2014), p. 10.

The relationship between these substantial changes to education provision and the attitudes of parents towards their children's education was a subject addressed by numerous post-war social surveys and studies. With a grammar school education so tightly linked to processes of upward social mobility, these analyses were generally organised around stratifications of social class. One 1950 study found education and training to be thought by all social groups, but particularly among working-class respondents, the most important lever in ascending the social scale.<sup>12</sup> But with considerable diversity of provision – not just of the type of schools available, but also the style and quality of teaching – and the uneven availability of grammar school places, many parents remained sceptical of the new system's merits.

Studies from earlier in the period, in more impoverished areas, or both, highlighted working-class concerns. The raised school-leaving age had extended the period before children could start contributing to family incomes and there was indifference towards academic learning at a time when manual work was so plentiful.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, some parents removed their children from school prematurely so they could take advantage of the healthy job market as soon as they were able.<sup>14</sup> There was also parental concern about the pressure the 11-plus examination put on children. Moreover, many believed that there remained dignity and worth in manual labour, and were resentful of the idea that life-chances should be linked to processes of upward social mobility.<sup>15</sup> Based on fieldwork in 1952, F.M. Martin reported a sliding social scale of interest in children's education and desire for a grammar school place – from professionals, four fifths of whom preferred grammars, to unskilled workers, of whom just over four out of 10 did.<sup>16</sup> There was also more interest in technical education among manual workers, and a subsection of the professional class preferred private

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<sup>12</sup> F.M. Martin, 'Some Subjective Aspects of Social Stratification' in D.V. Glass (ed) *Social Mobility in Britain* (Routledge, 1954).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Michael P. Carter, *Home, School and Work: A Study of the Education and Employment of Young People in Britain* (Pergamon, 1962), pp. 75-76; H.T. Himmelweit (1954) 'Social Status and Secondary Education since the 1944 Act: Some Data for London' in Glass (ed) *Social Mobility in Britain*, p. 15; Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> This was the case for a young Bill Wyman; see David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 574; see also Todd, *The People*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>15</sup> Todd, *The People*, pp. 220-221; King, *Family Men*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>16</sup> F.M. Martin (1954) 'An Inquiry into Parents Preferences in Secondary Education' in Glass (ed) *Social Mobility in Britain*, p. 163.

education.<sup>17</sup> Reflecting a desire for intergenerational continuity, contemporary surveys also found that parents who themselves had continued to higher education or become managers desired similar for their children.<sup>18</sup> In short, much of the research was reporting that the new education system affirmed social divisions rather than providing a means to overcome them.

However, as 'secondary education for all' became culturally entrenched, families became more affluent and less reliant on their children for income, and non-manual work became more commonplace, increasing numbers of parents came to recognise the possibilities that the new system offered. Increasingly, social investigators became struck by parents' growing educational ambitions for their children across the social spectrum.<sup>19</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott noted that such ambitions accorded with the desire among some manual workers that their sons should not experience the hardship and insecurity that had characterised their own working lives.<sup>20</sup> For advocates of embourgeoisement, such as Ferdinand Zweig, skilled workers and supervisors' interests in their children's education was commensurate with their desire for social betterment.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, John Goldthorpe and his colleagues did not share that view, but acknowledged that along with their focus on the nuclear family, the prizing of a quality secondary education was an attitude that Luton's affluent workers nonetheless shared with their middle-class counterparts.<sup>22</sup> Focus then fell on the failings of the new system to deliver against such widespread aspiration. With grammar school places limited in many areas, parents and children across classes were being left frustrated by having to settle for the increasingly maligned secondary moderns.<sup>23</sup> Before the 1960s expansion in the higher education sector, many secondary school alumni were likewise prevented from furthering their studies.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, it was identified that these

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> SESC (2018), 'Secondary Education and Social Change: Parents'.

<sup>19</sup> J.E. Floud, A.H. Halsey and F.M. Martin, *Social Class and Educational Opportunity* (Heinemann, 1957), pp. 75-77, 87; Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 46; Ministry of Education, 15 to 18 [Crowther Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1959), p. 65 quoted in SESC (2018), 'Parents'.

<sup>20</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, p. 130; see also Lawrence, *Workers' Testimony*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 46; Floud, et al., *Social Class*, pp. 147-148; Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), pp. 150-151; Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Floud, et al., *Social Class*, p. 3; Mandler, *Universities*, pp. 10-11.

demand-side issues revealed the persistence of structural social inequalities. Research suggested that there were certain educational advantages to being middle-class, in terms of home environment, likelihood of parental encouragement and size of family.<sup>25</sup> However, middle-class children were also more likely than their working-class counterparts to overcome *disadvantages*, such as parental disinterest and large family sizes.<sup>26</sup> These findings were born out in the disproportionately middle-class make-up of grammar school and university places.<sup>27</sup> As Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden put it in their study of 88 Huddersfield grammar school alumni in 1962, 'there is a process of social, as well as academic, selection going on in our schools'.<sup>28</sup> The recognition of growing demand and social bias would ultimately lead to 'comprehensive' secondary schools replacing the tripartite system in most regions through the late 1960s and early 1970s and the increase in provision of education beyond secondary level.<sup>29</sup>

Parental interest and encouragement was recognised as a key determinant of a child's educational success and it was clear that such interest was gendered as well as classed.<sup>30</sup> In his work on 15-year-old pupils in Sheffield, Michael Carter found that 'in most homes, mothers took the lead in "advising" [their children], and that 'anything to do with the kids' was considered a woman's concern'.<sup>31</sup> In her oral history of working-class families in Lancashire, Elizabeth Roberts identified an increased maternal interest in children's schooling after the war, replacing the filial reciprocity of domestic labour of earlier periods.<sup>32</sup> In his report of the mass cohort study of secondary school aged children in 1962, F.W. Douglas confirmed that the mother was in general 'more concerned than the father with school problems, and [had] the closest contact with teachers'.<sup>33</sup> He also observed that working-class mothers' involvement was more likely at primary than secondary school level, at which point their husbands were less inclined

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<sup>25</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, pp. 81-82; Himmelweit, *Social Status*, pp. 151-153; Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, p. 211; Martin, *Parents Preferences in Secondary Education*, p. 162.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Douglas, *Home and the School*, pp. 64-65, 90; Floud, et al., *Social Class*, pp. 144-145; Derek M. Toomey, 'Home-Centred Working Class Parents' Attitudes Towards their Sons' Education and Careers' in *Sociology*, 3 (1969).

<sup>27</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, pp. 77-78; Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Mandler, *Schools*, pp. 17-18; Mandler, *Universities*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, pp. 81-88.

<sup>31</sup> Carter, *Home, School and Work*, p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 73.



than their middle-class counterparts, to add their input, leaving a vacuum of parental support for working-class children after the age of 11.<sup>34</sup> Some of the social studies offered contrasting views. In his research with factory workers in four regions in 1958 and 1959, Zweig found a marked change from his findings ten years earlier. Commenting on attitudes towards 'education' with 'upbringing', he claimed that 'the overwhelming majority [of fathers] took an intense, sometimes passionate interest'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Michael Young and Peter Willmott found the new 1950s generation of fathers to be highly invested in their children's education, in line with their incursions also into other hitherto feminised practices of childcare.<sup>36</sup> But, as we have seen, such impressions were likely overstated. Moreover, gendered filial encounters with education were nuanced and complex. For example, Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden observed that among the parents of grammar school children, 'the mother protected and pushed the child, whilst the father raised the awkward practical question as to where it all led'.<sup>37</sup>

The child's gender also informed parental attitudes. Selina Todd has highlighted the lingering prejudiced attitudes of fathers towards the education and employment of girls in less enlightened working-class districts.<sup>38</sup> In Huddersfield, Jackson and Marsden observed a clear gender bias within families of grammar school children: 'It was... considered quite a natural state of affairs for boys to be more academically gifted, and so accepted by the family; whereas in the case where the girl stood out, relationships within the family became more fraught'.<sup>39</sup> In her oral history of middle-class women in the 1960s, Lynn Abrams reported feelings of envy on behalf of mothers, who were resentful of their daughters' emancipatory educational opportunities.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, by 1964, slightly more girls than boys were going to grammar school, and some of the social research reported more gender-blind parental attitudes towards children's educational advancement.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, with most apprenticeships beginning at 16, and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>37</sup> Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>38</sup> Todd, *The People*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>39</sup> Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden (1962), 'Fieldnotes for 'Education and the Working Class: Some General Themes Raised by a Study of 88 Working-Class Children in a Northern Industrial City'', pp. 35-36.

<sup>40</sup> Abrams, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 99. 20.2% of all girls and 18% of all boys went to grammar school; Himmelweit, *Social Status*, p. 102.

teacher training not until 18, there were respective incentives for boys to leave school early, and girls to stay on to complete their Higher National Certificates.<sup>42</sup> While it is difficult to generalise across such a range of experiences within and between social classes, broadly speaking, the period witnessed a greater interest in the education of boys and girls from all social backgrounds, albeit from a lower base in the case of children of manual workers. Where fathers were more engaged in their sons' education, their interest was more likely to intensify after the age of 11.

The data from the social research is valuable for highlighting broad social trends and concerns; however, its various methodological biases and limitations preclude a more intimate understanding of the impact of educational change on relationships in families. Investigators variously excluded mothers, fathers, daughters and sons from their interviews (though more commonly daughters).<sup>43</sup> Some studies also relied heavily on the views of teachers, rather than pupils, or parents of pupils, to ascertain information about homes and families.<sup>44</sup> While some studies looked more qualitatively at intergenerational dynamics, it was also common to see measures that flattened experience to statistical analyses. For example, 'parental interest' might be measured in numbers of parental visits to school, and 'parental aspiration' by percentages of parents desirous of grammar school educations for their children.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as Jon Lawrence has shown us, secondary analysis of social studies' fieldnotes should give us pause when assessing their conclusions.<sup>46</sup>

Just as Lawrence identifies distinct gendered and classed encounters between researcher and respondent in the Goldthorpe studies, similar dynamics were at play in, for example, the Jackson and Marsden study. One researcher's fieldnotes comments in particular betrayed the classed discursive scripts they drew on when describing their subjects: 'he had the good looks of an opening batsman ... she was working-class and

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<sup>42</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 98.

<sup>43</sup> On responses to male bias in the study, see Audrey Lambart, 'Mereside: A Grammar School for Girls in the 1960s' in *Gender and Education*, 9 (1997); Spencer, 'Site of Struggle'. A notable example of mothers rather than fathers being interviewed is Douglas, *Home and the School*. It is indicative of the idiosyncratic nature of the approaches that Young and Willmott claimed only to have been able to find grammar school girls, rather than boys, to interview. See Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, pp. 174-185.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Douglas, *Home and the School*.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*; Floud, et al., *Social Class*.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence, *Social-Science Encounters*.

had already gone to seed'.<sup>47</sup> Overwhelmingly, the studies belie a pre-occupation with socio-cultural barriers to, and outcomes of, class mobility, as experienced through the tripartite system of schooling.<sup>48</sup> While acknowledging that experiences of education in families were classed, as well as gendered, the remainder of this chapter examines the emotional dynamics of father-son relationships in this context of social and educational change, drawing out cross-class similarities as well as differences of experience across life-courses and between generations.

## 2. Fatherly Investments

Post-war changes to the structure of education beyond the home were woven into the emotional lives of fathers and sons in it. Born in 1946, Martin Curd was unsuccessful with his 11-plus examination first time around, but re-took and passed at 13. Commenting on his initial failure, he explained simply: 'I didn't particularly want to go to grammar... at that time, I wanted to be the same as my dad'.<sup>49</sup> His father, Henry, was a pattern maker at a local factory. Martin was a bright boy for whom the opportunities for social mobility presented by his school created a tension with his desire to emulate his father. As we saw in Chapter Two, as an adult, he was to become more comfortable with the idea of departing from his parents' social world and his father's worldview; indeed, he was to reject it for a more acquisitive approach to social advancement.<sup>50</sup> However, as a child, he remained beholden to his filial devotion. For his part, Henry remained patient and supportive. Remembering how his dad reacted when he brought his homework problems to him, Martin recalled:

He said look, I can't help you with it, but I'll listen and see if I can come up with... And he did, he would sit there and listen. I was able to go through it, and then suddenly the answer would come.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jackson and Marsden, 'Fieldnotes for 'Education and the Working Class.

<sup>48</sup> This was true even for those who made the relationship of 'home' or 'family', and 'school', explicit in the title of their investigations. See, for example, Carter, *Home, School and Work*; Douglas, *Home and the School*; Frank Musgrove, *The Family, Education and Society* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1966).

<sup>49</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>50</sup> Chapter Two, pp. 91-94.

<sup>51</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

The obligation of homework stood at the nexus of school and home. It was likely to be more onerous for grammar school children, but even for secondary modern and technical school pupils it had the potential to expose stark intergenerational differences as even interested fathers found the work too taxing.<sup>52</sup> But, as Henry and Martin found, such moments had the capacity to produce moments of emotional closeness as well as intergenerational alienation. Harry Tillett engaged with his son Steve's homework, finding that he could produce the correct answer to a maths problem, even if by a different method than had been advocated by the teacher.<sup>53</sup> Fred and Phil Avery's father was not beyond enlisting their local police officer, who often passed their house, to assist with his sons' algebra.<sup>54</sup> The help may have been outsourced, but the problem had been addressed collectively.

It was true that the higher parents' level of educational achievement the more likely it was for their children to succeed at school.<sup>55</sup> However, it was equally true that conducive home environments from infancy to adolescence were influential, and that parents of all educational levels were able to nurture such environments.<sup>56</sup> While there remained households in which little attention was given to reading material of any sort, sons from every social background in oral history interviews reported having books in the house and being read to. For the keenest children, local library memberships were arranged, with popular choices including the Enid Blyton stories, and the Biggles and Jennings adventure books. Moreover, typically homes might be well-stocked with a variety of literature, including encyclopaedias, *Reader's Digest* collections and assorted literary classics. It was not uncommon for children to have access to a newspaper at home; in fact, it was observed in one social study that boys were more likely than girls to read it, given their greater interest in the sports reports.<sup>57</sup> Zweig reported one manual worker who bought his son 'an expensive encyclopaedia because he is very clever'.<sup>58</sup> While the extent to which parents deployed such nurturing practices, varied,

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<sup>52</sup> Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp. 136-139; Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, pp. 211-213.

<sup>53</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 132.

<sup>54</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>55</sup> Martin, *Parents Preferences in Secondary Education*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 68.

<sup>57</sup> Carter, *Home, School and Work*, p. 303.

<sup>58</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 20.

such experiences did cross classes and offer sites of childhood learning and intergenerational connection.

Mike Saddington found his son David so desperate to consume any sort of literature that he would read the backs of cereal boxes over breakfast. Mike did not share his son's voracious appetite for reading, but nurtured it nonetheless:

I started to take the *Sunday Times*. You've got enough paper to light the fire every morning, you know, for a week! And er... he'll read it. Hopefully he'll absorb something like that you know. And, mind, he used to read it. And I bought something called the *Children's Newspaper* I think.<sup>59</sup>

The tone for privileging his son's education had been set much earlier in David's life. We saw in the last chapter that Mike had a distanced relationship with his son in infancy. Working in the Merchant Navy he was away for long periods, returning to find a son who did not recognise him and resisted his attempts to impose parenting strategies.<sup>60</sup> However, when it came to planning for David's schooling, Mike deferred to his wife's authority. Her decision to move the family back home from Malta, where Mike was happy and on a lucrative career path, was met with disappointment but ultimately acquiescence, as he explained:

She'd found out that if David had been old enough to go to school when we got [back to England] he wouldn't have been able to get fixed up, not for about three months or something. I don't know the technical reasons but... school... she thought the school situation wasn't very good. And... she said, what about the child's education? Well, my thoughts, for what they're worth, I used to think, if they've got it, they've got it, and if they haven't got it, well... you just press on, you know. And he was a bright enough lad as it happened. But she was worried about things like that. And plus, we've never had a settled home life. And here's me, all set to sign on, which would have taken me for another five years, and then probably another 10 years, like, because once you've done 12... And so that was it.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

<sup>60</sup> Chapter Three, pp. 133-134.

<sup>61</sup> ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

In common with many working-class fathers, Mike was sceptical about what a good education could do to enhance his child's natural ability; however, his wife's view held sway. In terms of his missed employment opportunities in Malta, Mike's misgivings were justified: on returning to England, he was forced to take a job as an airport security guard, which he described as 'low wage... nowhere job, a dead-end job'.<sup>62</sup> He went on to take up a number of unsatisfactory positions before eventually arriving at a job as a foreman. He may not have been as involved as his wife in decisions about his son's early schooling, but the matter caused him to make life-changing sacrifices. Mike's day-to-day interactions with David were routinely brief, fitted in around the structures of their respective work and school days; but they did not preclude him making gestures towards the advancement of his interest in reading.

Coming from quite different social backgrounds, fathers of privately educated children nonetheless shared certain attitudes and behaviours with Mike Saddington and other working-class men. Edward Winn and Norman Henry were similarly removed from matters to do with their children's schooling – even more so, given that their sons, Arthur and Charlie, went to boarding schools – but similarly devoted to the idea that they should receive the best education possible. The general pattern among working-class fathers was ambivalence about the merits of a good education when the 1944 Act came into force, evolving to broad support over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. We know relatively little about the attitudes of fathers of privately educated children over the same period.<sup>63</sup> However, the consistent proportion of independent school attendees (roughly, a steady 7% of the school-going population) suggests a high degree of intergenerational succession – particularly among attendees of expensive 'public' boarding schools, whose fees would exclude even the more socially mobile families.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, independent schools' insulation from the 1944 reforms stressed parents' right of choice, if they had the means and inclination.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> For a case study of a particular school, Ellesmere College, see Christine Heward, *Making a Man of Him: Parents and their Sons' Education at an English Public School, 1929-50* (Routledge, 1988).

<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the figures and the limitations of the data available, see SESC, 'Secondary Education and Social Change: Independent Schools After 1945' (2018).

<sup>65</sup> Hillman, *Public Schools and the Fleming Report of 1944: Shunting the First-class Carriage on to an Immense Siding?*, p. 253; As discussed in SESC (2018), 'Parents', such rights foretold the increasing levels of parental involvement in the state sector over the subsequent decades.

Un-enamoured with the options available in the rural part of Scotland in which they lived and keen for his son to become more independent and worldly, Edward Winn sent Arthur to boarding school more than 200 miles away in Wales. His wife later lamented the physical and emotional distance that the arrangement imposed upon their family – their absence even on sports days became symbolic of the rift that had grown between them. But the quality of the education superseded all other concerns.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Norman Henry considered a good education to be vital to Charlie's life-chances:

Right from the start I was determined that [my children] should be privately educated, because even in those days, the state education was very varied... And ...I was aware that if you wanted to get anything in the world, it helped to be educated, and... I would say, generally speaking, that my peer group... private education was pretty high up on the list of what you spent your money on.<sup>67</sup>

Norman's daughters also attended public school, though his ambitions for them did not extend to higher education. As he explained, 'I don't think in those days – I may be quite wrong – that girls were particularly interested in going to university and getting a first-class degree. They were more interested, I think, in probably finding a suitable swain'.<sup>68</sup> Norman's remarks about women and higher education misjudge the extent of female ambition and opportunities for self-fulfilment that post-war education reform provided.<sup>69</sup> They also underline his strictly gendered attitude to intergenerational, patriarchal succession. As we shall see in Chapter Five, Charlie's public school and university educations were necessary precursors to securing a successful career as an adult; contrastingly, Norman struggled to remember the jobs either of his daughters had before they married. Nonetheless, a good education was prized for girls and boys alike. We have seen how the use of understatement in the Henrys' testimony reinforced their confidence and upper-middle-class identities;<sup>70</sup> similarly, their insistence that they

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<sup>66</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 159.

<sup>67</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Abrams, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 60-61; Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 139.

<sup>70</sup> Chapter Two, pp. 114-115.

were both ‘badly educated’ and ‘philistines’ paradoxically underlined the high regard in which they held education as a social asset.<sup>71</sup>

There were also paradoxical underpinnings to Peter Wilkins’ attitude to education, though in his case they belied a humility that can be traced back to his own schooling in the 1930s and early 1940s. At the beginning of this chapter, we saw his enthusiasm for Tony Blair’s philosophy of ‘Education, education, education’; yet, elsewhere in the interview he described himself as ‘simple-minded’ and ‘not an educated man’.<sup>72</sup> Born in 1930, in rural Cambridgeshire, after finishing primary school aged 11, he was one of the first intake at the local village college. The then Chief Education officer, Henry Morris, had established these integrated institutions in various parts of the county from the mid-1930s with the intention of combining secondary and adult education in communities, and stemming migration from the countryside to the towns.<sup>73</sup> Peter had a torrid time at the college as an adolescent. He was regularly bullied, received little encouragement from his parents, and felt in any case destined to work for his father on the family farm as soon as he was able. In 1947, aged 17, however, he returned to the college, enrolling on an evening course in business and commercial management. As he described, ‘I felt I ought to be doing something somehow. My mother and father didn’t suggest it. I thought I ought to be doing something... part of the growing up process.’<sup>74</sup>

As the lessons unfolded he became inspired by his new tutor, who was more patient and supportive than his teachers had been a few years earlier. After a few weeks, Peter had something of an epiphany, when he was encouraged to share his knowledge of farming with the group:

I said, ‘who’d be interested in what I’m doing on farming?’ ... One of the chaps there, who’d been in the army for four or five years, trying to catch up you know, he said “I want to know about what you’re doing Martin”. The lecturer said, “well what have you been doing today?” I said – I’ve been preparing land for sugar beet. “What do you do to

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>73</sup> Henry Morris and Harry Râee, *The Henry Morris Collection* (CUP, 1984).

<sup>74</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins* (my emphases).



grow a field of sugar beet?" Well I could tell them that, you know. Fertilisers, and soil structures, and er... I said, – for a start... – I had to stand up in front of them... frightened me to death. But when I got going, there was no problem. I said – for a start in this country there are 3 types of soil: There's a heavy clay type soil, and there's an organic soil and there's a medium loam soil – which is in between. And, well, they listened. They were listening! I could see their faces, they were listening to me!<sup>75</sup>

The knowledge he had assimilated as apprentice to his unsupportive father was transformed in the context of the adult-learning classroom. His sense of self-realisation accorded with the progressive ideals the village college system was built upon, which as Laura Carter has argued, represented a continuation of innovative pedagogical approaches that straddled the 1944 Act.<sup>76</sup> It was similarly reflective of the cultural shift towards individual self-fulfilment discussed in Chapter Two, which Peter was absorbing across his life-course. His adult village college experience also underpinned his approach to his son Roger's education, which he described in terms of processes of rejection and transmission across three generations. Peter explained: 'It was expected... for me to go into the family business – that's how it was then. But I made up my mind that Roger was going to make up his own mind.'<sup>77</sup> It transpired that Roger's experience of school was neither inspirational nor especially problematic. His failure of the 11-plus caused little apparent upset and he went to a secondary modern school he described as 'fine'.<sup>78</sup> In accordance with his intentions, Peter allowed Roger to make his own decisions as he approached the end of school; with his father's blessing, Roger left to join the army cadets as soon as he was able.

### **3. Intersubjective Journeys Through Post-war Educational Reform**

Norman Livingstone, who entered secondary school in 1947, was among the first cohorts of pupils to go to a secondary modern school; his son Stephen, who turned 11 in 1969, was part of the first intake of the newly formed local comprehensive school. Their respective journeys through the post-war educational reforms and the intersubjective

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Morris and Râee, *Henry Morris*. On the benefits of progressive approaches in the village colleges, see Carter, *'Experimental' Secondary Modern Education*.

<sup>77</sup> ELL06, *Peter Wilkins*.

<sup>78</sup> ELL07, *Roger Wilkins*.

engagements they fostered tell a story of reciprocal filial love, curiosity and respect, but also generational social mobility and increasingly expansive opportunities for self-fulfilment. Norman failed his 11-plus examination, left school at 15, joined a shipping factory and served a five-year apprenticeship which qualified him to work in an office as a draughtsman. As he explained, grammar school and university had ‘never been on the cards... my studies really started when I left school’.<sup>79</sup> Norman was one of many men after war who conceived of education principally in terms adult vocational training. One outcome of the 1944 Act had been the stimulation of growth in further education at technical colleges, which offered day-release courses around employment for young people who terminated their school education at 15.<sup>80</sup> As far as Norman’s father was concerned, as we shall see in Chapter Five, he was simply pleased that his son had not had to ‘go down the pit’.<sup>81</sup> At the end of Norman’s apprenticeship, his mother was merely glad that she no longer had to wash his overalls. Nonetheless, the intergenerational transition to white-collar work was met with some consternation by other members of Norman’s family, who were concerned he might become ‘too big for his boots’.<sup>82</sup>

Born in 1958, Stephen was an intensely shy child, who was interested principally in reading and making things. Norman remembered evocatively the heart-wrenching process of sending Stephen to infant school, when he longed to remain at home with his mother: at the weekends ‘... you were free, then Monday morning, you were captive’.<sup>83</sup> With hindsight, Norman later lamented the lack of locally available nursery education, which would have made the transition less abrupt, and less painful. Eventually Stephen did settle, but remained closely attached to home. The transition to the junior school represented another hurdle. Ironically, Stephen remembered it as stepping back in time: from his infant school, a modernist building surrounded by large playing fields, to a structural remnant of the Victorian era, with dark classrooms and windows too high to see out. Here though Stephen brought home happy stories of a new male teacher, who, like him, had a passion for art and craft. It was not uncommon for children to

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<sup>79</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Haxby and David Parkes, 'Apprenticeship in the United Kingdom: From ITBs to YTS' in *European Journal of Education*, 24 (1989), p. 167.

<sup>81</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

respond particularly well to teachers of their own gender.<sup>84</sup> Stephen was so captivated by this particular teacher he drew on his experiences at school in fantasy play at home, where he named his toy Action Man figure after him. As Graham Dawson, whose childhood spanned a similar period to Stephen's, has argued with recourse to autobiographical self-reflection, Action Man figures could provide a canvas for experimentation with childhood masculine identity.<sup>85</sup> Fifty years later, Norman still remembered his son's teacher by name, recalling how delighted he had been that Stephen's art tuition exceeded the more limited art classes he had himself experienced at school in the 1930s and 1940s.

With their Local Education Authority dispensing with the 11-plus examination the year Stephen entered secondary school, attention shifted to which stream children were to be placed in the new comprehensive school. The transition from selection to 'multilateral' secondary schools was popular among parents and educationalists alike.<sup>86</sup> However, the ranking of pupils within the new schools, although the stakes were lower, still produced anxious moments for parents and children. Norman described the Livingstone family's experience:

We went to the meeting... where they told you what the system was going to be. And children would be streamed and all this sort of thing. And then some of the grammar school teachers were in the audience, and they... I remember one guy standing up, saying, basically... 'we're going to have a lot of plebs to teach sort of thing'. And the director of education stood up and said 'well that shows that you're good teachers'. And this guy just sat down and didn't speak the rest of the night. But then... they read out all the kids from your school that were going into Marden, which stream you were going to be in... it was just the parents... and you were waiting for Stephen's name being mentioned... anyway, it came out in the top stream, which was wonderful.<sup>87</sup>

The tensions foretold in Norman's recollection of the disgruntled grammar school teacher were played out in Stephen's experience of the school. He remembered being

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<sup>84</sup> Douglas, *Home and the School*, p. 100.

<sup>85</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp. 245-247.

<sup>86</sup> Mandler, *Schools*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>87</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

physically and culturally isolated from the children in the lower streams, and from the ex-secondary modern children in the four years above him. Martin Curd, whose school was amalgamated with another to cater for previously grammar and technical school educated pupils, described a similar situation, in which his group were 'outcasts'.<sup>88</sup> But for Norman Livingstone, his pleasure that his son made the highest stream was vindicated. A much more confident child than he had been at five, entering the infant school, Stephen negotiated the new experience of comprehensive school with relative ease. Like other bright schoolboys he had found himself a sport, in his case football, which enabled him to participate in cerebral and creative endeavours while retaining a foothold in a more socially acceptable boy culture. He also benefitted from having a loving, interested and engaged father, whose aspiration for his son was simply for him to find happiness at school and in life.

Fred and Phil Averys' discussion of the 11-plus examination revealed how, even within the same family, subjective experiences of academic selection could have quite contrasting social and emotional effects. Fred took the 11-plus in 1950, and Phil in 1956 – experiences, which as they described, had profound consequences.

*Fred:* Where did I go after that then?  
*Phil:* London Road?  
*Fred:* No, I didn't go to London Road...  
*Phil:* Oh no, Brighton Tech.  
*Fred:* Brighton Tech, oh, yeah, that's right, 'cause by that time I was 11, and I went to the erm...  
*Phil:* You passed the 11-plus  
*Fred:* No, I didn't pass the 11-plus  
*Phil:* Oh.  
*Fred:* You may think I did but I didn't.  
*Phil:* Oh, I thought you passed your 11-plus.  
*Fred:* And that was another bonus...  
*Phil:* ...huge, huge exam, that was, because it made or broke your life.  
*Fred:* Yeah, well the big bone of contention was that I failed. And my dad and the teachers knew that I shouldn't have failed.

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<sup>88</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

- Phil:* You could have done better.
- Fred:* Yeah. So, they did, they did actually meet over this and er eventually they, er, they convinced the examining board.... I can't think who the examining board were but erm they did appeal to the examining board to make an exception, in my case, and er I did actually then go to... Well, I had a choice of, no, no, I didn't have a choice, but shall we say most people when they passed the 11-plus they went to the grammar school, which was the sort of top notch. Then there was what they called the Hove County, which was erm not quite so upmarket as the grammar school but very close, and then you had a third option, which I went to, which was the technical school. And I went to the technical school in er Hanover Terrace in Brighton, and you can look all that up on the internet, because there's the Old Boys' Association, you know, full of it, fantastic. I really enjoyed those days.
- Interviewer:* Why did you choose to go to the...?
- Fred:* I don't think it was as much choice as, you know, you're lucky to be considered, or reconsidered, at all. We don't think you're good enough for grammar, erm... we, dad's background was bricklaying. And I think he said, well, he'd probably be better off at technical school than any of the other two, and I think er by the time they'd hammered it out, that was the best option.<sup>89</sup>

The image Fred and Phil conjure of their father defies easy categorisation. As we have seen, he led his family through prolonged periods of debt and precarity through a series of badly judged investments and building projects.<sup>90</sup> But he was evidently a devoted father too. It was not uncommon for working-class men to approve of technical schools (where they were available) for their sons' education, but Jack Avery's interest went further.<sup>91</sup> He had been a member of the parent-teacher association at Fred's primary school, and at one stage had led a successful campaign to build a new school canteen. Fred's claim that the examining board made an 'exception' in his case is questionable given that he went on to go to technical school. But Fred had never been destined to go

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<sup>89</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

<sup>90</sup> Chapter Two, p. 101.

<sup>91</sup> Martin, *Parents Preferences in Secondary Education*, p. 163. In Hertfordshire, one in four supervisors, and one in five skilled and unskilled workers wanted their sons to go to technical school. .

to grammar school; in the conversation that followed his failure of the 11-plus, his father's bricklaying appeared to rubberstamp the decision to settle on a technical education, which appeared to please all parties involved. Moreover, Fred's framing of the episode allowed him to reclaim partial control over the decision about his secondary education. It also affirmed his father's devotion to his childhood self, which contributed to his narrative motif of reverential commemoration.

It transpired that Phil's misunderstanding about Fred having in fact failed the 11-plus formed part of a larger narrative of personal frustration and failure concerning his own experience of the exam. Phil described how he had finished early, checked over his work several times, but found to his horror with just five minutes of the allotted time left that four pages of the exam paper had been stuck together.

I was so embarrassed. I thought, they're going to call me a right idiot. I wouldn't talk to anybody or tell anybody because I couldn't admit to anybody that I was so stupid, as to not have realised that these pages were stuck together. But... it's as they come of the print machine they were ... it just looked like one page to me and I kept turning it over, and ... I was very disappointed afterwards that somebody didn't come and say, "look Phil, we got a feeling your pages might have been stuck together, do you want to have another go?" But it never happened ... I just wonder sometimes what my life might have been, had those four pages not been stuck together.<sup>92</sup>

Phil's vivid memory accords with his recollection of the importance of the 11-plus, which, as we saw earlier, in Phil's view 'made or broke your life'. He also confessed in the interview that this was the first time he had ever had shared this story; although his bitter feelings about it had evidently stayed with him. His shame and disappointment were compounded by his mistaken belief that his brother Fred had passed. This was a myth that, with the brothers' collective silence on the subject in the intervening period, had been allowed to endure for sixty years. For Phil, the idea that Fred had failed was inconceivable in the family lore which held that his brother's transition to secondary school was happy, harmonious and in accordance with their father's wishes.

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<sup>92</sup> ELL03.

Phil's account prompted discomposure for Fred, who, it appeared, had either never known about the story of the exam pages sticking together or had repressed it in the process of constructing an untroubled narrative of childhood nostalgia and filial connection. Fred commented:

No, I think, you have told me... because we have a chat – we have a right old laugh on occasions – and I'm sure you've told me that before. Although, I might... I mean I couldn't remember... you know, that you'd actually told me that, but now you've brought it up again, it does ring a bell.<sup>93</sup>

Phil explained that he went on to go to one of the very first comprehensive schools, which was 'ok', while remaining 'a bit sore' about his 11-plus experience.<sup>94</sup> As we shall see, their contrasting experiences extended into adolescence and adulthood. Fred went on to technical college, was apprenticed by his father and, with his approval, embarked on a career as a quantity surveyor. Phil had several false starts in his career before settling on a job outside his father's sphere of understanding, working with children with special needs. The presence of fatherly interest and aspiration in Fred's story is emphasised by its absence in Phil's: for whatever reason, Phil had been too embarrassed to share his experience with his parents. The brothers' intersubjective processing and narrating of their stories show how the same academic results can produce vastly different emotional outcomes. They also show how psychic negotiations of childhood experiences remain in motion across life-courses.

Alan Birchwood was a highly engaged parent and school governor of Mark's primary school; governors' meetings were even held in the Birchwoods' house. Like many post-war parents, his aspirations for his son were framed by his own experience as a boy. Born in 1927, Alan's secondary education had been substantially disrupted by the war. However, as an evacuee, he spent four years boarding at an unconventional independent school, the experience of which caused him to be a keen advocate of progressive pedagogical methods throughout his life. Nonetheless, Mark and his two sisters were educated in the state sector. Mark enjoyed primary school, passed his 11-

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<sup>93</sup> ELL03, Fred and Phil Avery.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

plus and went to grammar school. He jokingly recalled his entry into selective education as occurring ‘much to the disgust’ of his parents.<sup>95</sup> Alan and his wife were sceptical of the grammar school system. But, like many middle-class parents, their scepticism was born of a liberal worldview which similarly precluded paying for private education<sup>96</sup> Alan remembered: ‘Well, we said – look, he’s passed it. That’s the system at the moment.... Er... alright; the school has got a good name’.<sup>97</sup> Compromised but determined, they directed their efforts towards encouraging Mark and his sisters, helping with homework, regularly consulting teachers, and discussing decisions about subject selection.<sup>98</sup> Alan was still uncomfortable with aspects of his son’s school culture though. Mark remembers that his father had a ‘pacifist thing going on’, which prevented Mark from joining the school’s Combined Cadet Force, and instead led to him undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.<sup>99</sup> Alan remembers the process slightly differently, suggesting that the Duke of Edinburgh scheme provided a good reason to miss ‘rugger’, a sport neither father or son liked.

Alan’s support was underpinned by a desire for his son to take the opportunities that had been unavailable to him as a boy, as he explained:

Well, I, yes. I suppose I hoped that ... by going to a what was known as a good grammar school, there would be a chance [for Mark] to go on further, to university. Because both my brother and sister went to good grammar schools and both went to university. I missed out because of my... early war years... so I wasn’t qualified to do high school cert’ then get university entrance.<sup>100</sup>

Describing how his own parents, a civil engineer and pharmacist-cum-pianist, had also excelled in their educational achievement, Alan described ‘a sort of line’ that had become part of family lore: ‘yes, we could aim high’.<sup>101</sup> Alan himself had taken

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<sup>95</sup> ELL05, Mark Birchwood.

<sup>96</sup> Young and Willmott document the middle-class anxiety surrounding options for their children at 11 in *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, p. 113.

<sup>97</sup> ELL04, Alan Birchwood.

<sup>98</sup> On the classed relationship between resources at home and success at grammar school, see Colin Lacey, *Hightown Grammar: The School as a Social System* (MUP, 1970), p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> ELL05, Mark Birchwood.

<sup>100</sup> ELL04, Alan Birchwood.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



undertaken nightschool classes alongside work to compensate for his loss of educational opportunity during the war.<sup>102</sup> In the same way Alan had made the best out of an imperfect situation with his own war-disturbed education, he worked with Mark to offer filial solidarity as they encountered the academic and cultural challenges of his grammar school. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, Mark bore the weight of his family's achievements with some discomfort. Performing only modestly well at grammar school and university, he became acutely conscious that he had not made the most of opportunities that his father had craved when he was young.<sup>103</sup> Alan's interest and engagement in Mark helped shape his passage through education; however, his aspirations led to a degree of disappointment and dissatisfaction for both generations.

The Birchwoods' story was consistent with social research that shows the extent of middle-class concern with their children's education and career prospects.<sup>104</sup> It was also illustrative of the joint conjugal approach to parenting that characterised much of Alan's testimony. The testimonies of other middle-class families betrayed a gendering of parental interest in their children's education more in line with the maternal caregiver model, with little suggestion of greater paternal involvement as children got older. Andrew Coverley was, like Mark Birchwood had been, a boy burdened by guilt over his failure to do well at grammar school. His feelings were compounded by his suspension from sixth form having been seen out drinking by one of his teachers. But it was his mother who later taught him O-Level Geography at home so he could catch up, just as it had been her fifteen years earlier who had removed him from the village primary school so he could instead travel to an alternative with a better academic reputation.<sup>105</sup>

In Laws family, it was also maternal intervention that smoothed Stephen's passage through school. By the time Stephen turned 11, Arthur had become a manager and the family had moved to a semi-detached house in a middle-class neighbourhood,

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<sup>102</sup> As Lawrence has argued, enrolment in nightschool classes was a sign of aspiration that crossed classes. Lawrence, *Workers' Testimony*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>103</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>104</sup> J.M. Pahl and R.E. Pahl, *Managers and their Wives: A Study of Career and Family Relationships in the Middle Class* (Allen Lane, 1971), pp. 63-67. For example, middle-class parents of secondary school-aged children were likely to move into an area with the most desirable school if the husband's job requires them to relocate.

<sup>105</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037; SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

but his salary would not stretch to paying for private school. So, when Stephen failed his 11-plus, his parents were faced with a challenging situation. Labour voters, but not ideologically opposed to academic selection, they remained overwhelmingly committed to giving Stephen the best education possible. Stephen's mother took matters into her own hands:

*Stephen:* Well the local infant school round the corner. Erm.. I went there for the first three or four years. And then I failed my 11-plus... can you remember? And I can still remember you saying, there was a private school in Tynemouth village... and mam and dad decided...

*Arthur:* Your mother decided!

*Stephen:* ...mother decided [laughs]... that it would be wiser for me to get, as it were, the better start... because my sister was clever. Chris was clearly bright... so mum decided – and you [gestures to Arthur] agreed – and I went to King's school in Tynemouth for my education from I guess around 10 onwards... nine or 10... and that was fee-paying. So, I always remember, basically, mum worked for my fees, and my sister stayed in the state sector, and she was bright as a button.<sup>106</sup>

Still, Stephen only managed five O-Levels and did not do well at A-Level; but his mother intervened again, personally telephoning Newcastle University and managing to secure Stephen a place on the general science degree course. The Coverleys' and Laws' stories show how mothers were often better placed than fathers to shoulder the burden of adapting to new circumstances when sons' routes through education took unexpected turns. That Stephen's mother decided to make the sacrifice for a failing son, rather than a gifted daughter, illustrates how stubbornly engrained the gendering of education and work remained when difficult decisions about prioritisation needed to be taken. Moreover, they illustrate the particular and subjective routes that post-war families took through the post-war education, which owed as much to parents and children's attitudes and relationships as it did their social backgrounds.

## **Conclusions: Social, Political and Emotional Contexts**

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<sup>106</sup> ELL10, *Arthur and Stephen Laws*.

In the same way fathers reflected on the closeness of their relationships to their sons as adults as a measure of their parenting successes with them when they were children, reflections on educational achievement was also assessed from the perspective of later adulthood. We have seen how Mark Birchwood bore the psychic weight of not have 'aimed high' to the same degree as other family members had. John Taylor carried a different emotional legacy. He proudly remembered going to grammar school as going 'upper-class' and being awestruck by his school's imposing architecture. Asked if his parents had been similarly proud, he replied, 'Oh, I should think so... I was the er... I suppose I was the first, first child of that generation ... first child of their family to go to a grammar school'.<sup>107</sup> 'Should' and 'suppose' belie his uncertainty, which, as we have seen, correspond to the intergenerational disharmony present elsewhere in John's testimony. Correspondingly, despite four of his sons going to grammar school, three to university (including John) and one gaining a doctorate, Bill Taylor was notably non-committal about his own sense of pride: 'Never done anything that er, we haven't been proud of them, have we?'<sup>108</sup> Steve Tillett's emotional inheritance took a different form. He traced his present-day lack of career ambition and sense of having disappointed his parents to the pamphlets his mother had bought him to help with the 11-plus; he ignored them and passed anyway, which Steve suggested triggered a complacent attitude towards hard work that he has carried into adulthood. Where John had exceeded expectations and received only modest appreciation, Steve had underachieved and felt regretful about his complacency in response to his parents' encouragement. Such were the myriad, subtle emotional dynamics of intergenerational responses to education across life-courses.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, such was the significance of education in the formation of selfhoods and wider society, it was common for men to locate their personal experience along social and political coordinates, which, from the perspective of middle and old-age, led to stories of progress and decline. As a young father, Harry Tillett had taken time to help Steve with his homework and would have sent him private school had they been able to afford it. It also transpired that his

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<sup>107</sup> *John Taylor*, p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

experience in the jungle in the army had inspired Steve to study biology O-Level in the 1960s. Interviewed in 1986, however, his view of education was more downbeat, influenced by the recent arrival of a new manager at his local coal-pit:

But schools don't learn you to cope with life at all, do they? They cram knowledge into 'em which is virtually bloody useless. It doesn't do 'em any good. It's all right for general knowledge, but it's no good to your general working life at all—to my mind anyway.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, Henry Curd had listened patiently while Martin explained his homework problems and been proud that he stayed on at school to take his Higher National Certificate. Speak in 1988, however, his views were more jaded:

This is the thing... that you take an intellectual in his university. You put him in a jungle, he's useless. So, what do you call by education? Knowledge is a different thing to education. I think that knowledge and knowing how to go about things, or what to do if something goes wrong, that's the main thing. But being an intellectual and... actually, I think they're toffee nosed, a lot of these intellectuals, its only being what they are because everybody else around them is the same thing. But I think of being yourself. If you like classical music or intellectual things, do it. If you don't, then don't be afraid of saying you don't like it.<sup>110</sup>

Such views correspond with Michael Roper's findings about white-collar workers who considered themselves insufficiently manly to walk the shop floor.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, As Peter Mandler has argued, the 1980s, when Harry and Henry were interviewed, was a curious decade for universities as growth stalled, funding was cut, and they became scapegoated by a tabloid press searching for an outlet for popular frustration with social inequities.<sup>112</sup> In these fathers' eyes, education was now associated with a managerial class that knew little about work in practice, where, as young parents, they had engaged with its potential as a route to a happy and prosperous career.

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<sup>109</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>110</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>111</sup> Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man* p. 107.

<sup>112</sup> Mandler, *Universities*, pp. 13-16.

In contrast, Peter Wilkins' 2016 evangelisation of 'education, education, education' came at a time when education was what Mandler has described as a 'nearly universal social norm' – certainly something that Peter's step-grandchildren were enjoying the benefits of.<sup>113</sup> Speaking in 2017, Charlie Henry shared Peter Wilkins' enthusiasm for education. However, his ideological belief in its importance owed more to intergenerational sustenance of class hierarchy at a social as well as personal level. Just as his father had prioritised private education for Charlie and his sisters, so too did Charlie ensure that his daughter was educated privately. He explained, 'the only thing you can give your kid is a good education. A socialist government can take your money away, but they can't take your education'.<sup>114</sup> We saw in Chapter Two how class privilege coexisted with disapproval of deference and snobbery in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century society. Charlie's and Peter's outlooks on education emerge from such contexts. Charlie clung to the achievement of private sector education to have endured through left as well as right-wing governments, dating back to its resilience even in the face of the 1944 reforms. Peter, who as a young adult had benefitted from the democratising impulse of the progressive village college system in the late 1940s, had come to recognise the intrinsic value of education and had supported widening access ever since.

Present-day perspectives on national and personal journeys through mid to late twentieth and early-twenty-first century education reveal how psychic and familial experiences intersect with political and social worldviews. The social changes wrought by the 1944 Education Act enabled widening access to education and opportunities for social mobility for millions of British children. The exclusion of the independent sector from significant reform permitted parallel intergenerational patterns of continuity for those with the means and inclination to pay for private education. Examining post-war education through the lens of father-son relationships reveals the way families were sites of mediation for experiences of education for families from all social backgrounds. Everyday fatherly engagements in their sons' educations were limited by the timebound restrictions of their work; but their investments in education as a pathway to career success and self-fulfilment were often profound – from significant financial outlay, to

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>114</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

the curtailment of overseas work, to simply finding time to listen to a homework problem being explained. Nonetheless, mothers' sacrifices, from taking on extra work to home-schooling, were sometimes more significant. A boy's entry to secondary school, whether via the 11-plus examination or later into streamed comprehensives, marked a significant life-stage in his development, which was experienced intergenerationally. Even a pair of working-class siblings, who both failed their 11-plus examinations, could describe profoundly contrasting social and emotional outcomes. Moreover, the uneven regional rollout of the 1944 Act was mirrored by the range of particular and intersubjective experiences of fathers and sons. As we shall see in the next chapter, such experiences were antecedents to the next significant lifestage for post-war sons, the entry into the workplace.

## Chapter Five.

# Labours of Leisure: Masculinity Within and Beyond the Workplace

Asked to sum up what he had inherited from his parents, David Shotton replied 'Just being a hardworking person I suppose, like my dad was'.<sup>1</sup> David was born in Newcastle in the late 1960s, during a period of considerable social and industrial change; however, his testimony reflects a common understanding about masculinity, work, and generational succession that has held for centuries. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the demands of male breadwinning were seldom neglected for men between 1945 and 1974, and that their performances as fathers should be seen in this context. This chapter puts men's work centre stage and assesses the ways in which it affected family life. In general, across the period, men were being paid substantially more than they had been and working longer hours, including overtime. They were also taking more holidays and spending more time at home; so, leisure, as well as labour, was experienced in new and formative ways. This chapter shows how when viewed through the lens of post-war father-son relationships, categories of labour and leisure become blurred. I illustrate the way that men's attitudes and behaviours surrounding work penetrated the realms of family leisure, children's jobs and children's play. I argue that when we view work and leisure in this way, through the subjective and intersubjective lives of men and boys, male domesticity is revealed to be less about orientation towards families and more about stubborn emotional attachments to labour.

Male breadwinning remained by far the most normal mechanic of providing for families in post-war Britain.<sup>2</sup> Despite growing numbers of women in the workforce, the perception that their work was ancillary to men's remained stubbornly ingrained,

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<sup>1</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*.

<sup>2</sup> In 1971, the percentage of working-age men who were economically active remained high, at 91%, as the equivalent number for women had risen sharply, but only to 57%. Many of these had been full-time mothers for significant portions of their adult lives and were unlikely to earn as much as their husbands. See Gazeley, *Manual Work and Pay*, pp. 55-56. See also Introduction, p. 19.

driven in part by lower pay and part-time hours, and in part by its imagined contribution to only non-essential items.<sup>3</sup> As Helen McCarthy has argued, married women who did work were able to leverage the status work gave them to affect power dynamics in their relationships.<sup>4</sup> As we saw in Chapter Two, there was some evidence of this dynamic in the division of household tasks between family members. However, the fundamental convention of men's absence at work for long periods to earn money to provide remained. In her work on post-war Lancashire families, Elizabeth Roberts provided a corrective to the idea that the fundamental ordering of post-war family life had changed:

Our evidence shows that it was still possible to define a typical family unit in 1970. It continued to be one which lived close to relatives, one where adult children still lived at home until marriage and one where the husband was still the chief, and sometimes the only, wage-earner, and where considerable difference in the roles of men and women still remained.<sup>5</sup>

The post-war period saw considerable changes to the nature of male work, including the deskilling of manual labour, the growth of managerial and clerical jobs, and longer periods of time spent by young men in education and training, but these changes left the fundamental pattern of male breadwinning little altered. What did change was the scope of what men were able to provide. Even allowing for price inflation, men's average earnings increased in real terms by more than 40 per cent between 1950 and 1968, and there were similar increases to the pay of youths and boys, who of course did not share the same financial responsibilities as their fathers.<sup>6</sup> The leisure market grew to in response to people's newly enhanced spending power, from household technologies and holidays to toys, records, fashions and the night-time economy.<sup>7</sup> As we

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<sup>3</sup> Finch and Summerfield, *Companionate Marriage*, p. 16; Wilson, *The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*.

<sup>4</sup> McCarthy, *Women, Marriage and Paid Work*.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Gazeley, *Manual Work and Pay*, p. 70; increases in women's earning were less, indicative of a widening gender pay gap after the gains made during the Second World War.

<sup>7</sup> Osgerby, *Youth in Britain*, Chapter Four; Julie-Marie Strange (2007) 'Leisure' in Francesca Carnevali and Strange (eds) *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* (Pearson, 2007), pp. 207-208, 211.



shall see, the acceleration of the relationship between earning and spending caused many men to work extra hours in order to sustain their families' ways of life.

Mathew Thomson has argued that children's leisure over this period was tightly structured around the interests of parental responsibility, practices of organised play, concerns for road safety and fears of strangers.<sup>8</sup> While, as he suggests, child-centred psychology and post-war anxiety may have combined to inculcate an instinct to protect and preserve 'the child', an exploration of subjective experience reveals *children* to have been gendered social agents, who were more concerned with themselves and their peers than with adult intervention.<sup>9</sup> Men recalled boyhood interests in sport, the military, television and a whole range of hobbies and activities, which were experienced individually and in homosocial groups. As they got older, they also undertook childhood work themselves, rehearsing their adult male lives to come. In their teenage years, experiences of labour and leisure unfolded further as their horizons broadened. As Gillian Mitchell, Selina Todd and Hilary Young, have argued, there were more favourable interactions between parents and adolescents over this period than chroniclers of the post-war 'generation gap' have implied.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, as Todd and Pat Ayres have also observed of Liverpool factory workers, immersion in new fashions and music combined with the assuredness that work was plentiful to breed a new form of swaggering self-confident young worker, unrecognisable to their fathers' generation.<sup>11</sup>

Doubtless, fathers were present during their sons' leisure time, and more so during practices of childhood work and in the decision-making process about future work as sons came of age. However, such incursions were partial and timebound. A father's influence was largely symbolic, in his capacity as a model of adult masculinity, rather than in the form of direct intervention. This chapter draws on retrospective experiences of childhood play and youth culture to illustrate occasional, and sometimes unlikely points of intergenerational connection between fathers and sons. I also show how boys' journeys from childhood to adult work emerged variously in conflict and

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<sup>8</sup> Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> On instincts to preserve and protect, see *ibid.*, especially Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, 'Reassessing *'the Generation Gap'*', especially pp. 4-5, 20; Todd and Young, *Baby-boomers*, especially pp. 459-460.

<sup>11</sup> Todd, *The People*, p. 275; Ayres, *Masculinities in Post-War Liverpool*, pp. 159-160.

harmony with their fathers' hopes and expectations at a time when the nature of work and youth opportunity was undergoing substantial change.

As we have seen, probably the most influential contemporaneous study into the relationship between men's approach to work and their circumstances at home was John Goldthorpe's *Affluent Worker* studies. Goldthorpe proposed that the attitude of the newly affluent working class was 'instrumental'. Work was undertaken chiefly as a means to an end; the end being the security and wellbeing of his family life at home, which was privileged at the expense of workmates, fellow unionists or other 'leisure companions'.<sup>12</sup> The result, according to Goldthorpe, was a degree of 'normative convergence' of manual workers' affluent lifestyles and those of their lower-order clerical counterparts, rather than an underlying working-class predisposition to aspire towards middle-class ways of life (*embourgeoisement*).<sup>13</sup> Revisionist critiques of Goldthorpe have nuanced his conclusions, pointing to more heterogeneous attitudes towards work among both blue and white-collar workers.<sup>14</sup> Goldthorpe's analysis helps frame the findings of this chapter, which delves deeper into the ways which men's thoughts about their work, across classes, pervaded their families' lives, with specific attention to how they affected their sons' conceptions of adult masculinity. I argue firstly that, from the perspective of later life, greater precedence is afforded to the *intrinsic* value of work than Goldthorpe credited, the appreciation of which emerges pan-generationally. Secondly, I illustrate how work mentalities made substantial encroachments into post-war family life, notably in practices of adult male leisure, including DIY, gardening and holidays. Thirdly, I show how although sons' play and leisure generally excluded adults, it nevertheless provided occasions to rehearse adult masculinities, including work identities, and generated opportunities for unlikely reciprocal filial connection. Finally, I examine experiences of childhood work, through which fathers were able to impart the principles of a strong work ethic and transactional financial reward. Ferdynand Zweig may have been overstating the new dawn of post-war work and social change when he remarked that:

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<sup>12</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, pp. 39-41, 149, 175.

<sup>13</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>14</sup> For a critical discussion of 'normative convergence', see Lawrence, *Workers' Testimony*.

...the attitude to work is amongst the most complex of all a man's attitudes, often involving not only strong ambivalence but also side-thrusts in all directions, and links with his way of life, home and family. Work transforms his entire being, imposes certain ways of living and introduces him into a whole network of compelling human relationships.<sup>15</sup>

I do not suggest that work was so transformational, nor share Zweig's optimism for the network of relationships it gave rise to; nonetheless, his expansive interpretation of men's relationship with work has some resonance with the stories that follow.

## **1. Fathers at Work**

I begin by seeking to understand fathers' attitudes towards their work, and the effects of those attitudes towards their family relationships. It was Zweig's contention that post-war improvements in factory conditions, such as increased job security, better facilities for washing and less punishing hours, meant that the separation of home and work was more pronounced.<sup>16</sup> Homes were more 'insulated' from men's work lives because there were fewer stresses to be carried over from the latter to the former.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Zweig paints a characteristically optimistic picture of men's feelings towards work both across groups of steelworkers working in traditional settings and workers in the newly automated car manufacturers; the vast majority enjoyed, liked or at least 'good humouredly tolerate[d]' their jobs.<sup>18</sup> It followed, therefore, that in general men had little need to discuss work at home. Work only became of interest in and of itself higher up the workplace hierarchy, upon which, it was duly more likely to be discussed at home.<sup>19</sup> In the colliery town of Featherstone a few years earlier, work was similarly circumscribed in so far as miners' wives were neither knowledgeable nor interested in their husbands' work.<sup>20</sup> However, the working conditions at that time were much harder.<sup>21</sup> John Mogeey reported a similar distinction of home from work in Oxford

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<sup>15</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-87.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis, et al., *Coal*, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

families. A job was regarded as 'the foundation and sustainer of the home'; vital to its security and prosperity, but fundamentally separate.<sup>22</sup> In Goldthorpe's analysis the relationship was best described as 'instrumental'; work lacked intrinsic value but offered extrinsic benefits by way of wages that could significantly improve standards of family life.<sup>23</sup>

The impression of the unskilled and semi-skilled labourer's inclination to leave their uninspiring work at work, and the manager, supervisor or engineer's inclination to share aspects of more interesting work life with his family, is complicated in oral history narratives with fathers and sons. Firstly, the relish with which a variety of workers expounded on the minutiae of their jobs betrayed a cross-class enthusiasm for their intrinsic value. These relatively lengthy excerpts represent just a fraction of detail post-war fathers went into about their jobs over the course of their interviews:

...they had a welding shop so I was welding up gun parts and aircraft parts, you know, and one of the jobs I had was erm, the drop tanks on the aircraft... on the Typhoons and Temptress (?) aircraft, they had loads of drop tanks, and they come in like quarters and had to be welded together, in a continuous weld. You mustn't stop welding... 'cause you get a blowhole, and they would leak, obviously. So, you had to go and get a certificate... continuous weld... so you had somebody all the time, supplying you the welding wire, and you had to gas-weld (?) it all the time, you know, one continuous weld. That's one of the jobs, and that was what I was doing then.<sup>24</sup>

Bill Taylor, Mechanic

I was working on... er ... ways and means of making evaporation masks to make microelectronic devices. So, the micron was really a bit on the big side... we were working on the Angstrom [?] field... whilst my colleague was working on the first generation of linear accelerators, which were being used both for industrial purposes and for medical use, and we were trying to develop this machine, which would focus a beam of electrons er... into a 1mm diameter spot. And control it too. To within a few microns... using a machine which weighed about seven or eight tonnes... So, there he was with this massive great machine, which at that time lived in a pit.... They provided...

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<sup>22</sup> Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>24</sup> ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

plenty of radiation protection... ah... and I was working on things, which even the microscope was getting damn difficult to see!<sup>25</sup>

Alan Birchwood, Mechanical Engineer

It's to do with foundries. Foundries.... when they make these castings, they have to make 'em in sand, and make the moulds in sand, and we had to make the things ... This is a funny thing... if you got say a casting and it was like a box shape thing – like gear box, like you've got on the car, you make the outside as it is, but the inside you make in a separate box, so there's just the inside shape, on the outside there'll be a square solid box, with just the shape of the gearbox inside. It gets really complicated, 'cos imagine the gearbox and you get the outside shape and it's pushed into the sand, if they'd filled that up with metal, it'd be a solid block. So, what they have to do is to make the inside shape fit inside that in another piece of sand. So, they gotta shell - they got the inside - and they've got the outside and they've got this sorta thin shell of metal space round, between the two bits of sand to put the metal in.<sup>26</sup>

Henry Curd, Pattern Maker (skilled)

I used to work at Brum, doing the bikes, making the bicycles, Hercules and DSA... You'd have different jobs. You know - getting the buckles outa the wheels, tightening the spokes and loosening them. That was one job I used to do. And there was another one you had to go in some mornings and they'd want you at the stoves where they used to put all the mudguards off the bikes in there after they'd painted 'em... Machines to make all the - things. 'Course, the frame of a bike is all tubing. And it was all cut up and put in jigs and welded and - you know, braced together. Painted.<sup>27</sup>

Sidney Sorrell, Factory Worker (semi/unskilled)

In each of these examples, the men's enthusiasm for their work is betrayed by certain turns of phrase: 'all the time, you know, one continuous weld'; 'even the microscope was getting damn difficult to see'; 'It gets really complicated'; 'course, the frame of a bike is all tubing'. Such motifs betray a distinctly masculine language of work, which may have been deployed in order to strengthen the rapport with the interviewer in the case of Bill Taylor and Alan Birchwood, whom I interviewed. They may also have been used to

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<sup>25</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

<sup>26</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>27</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 132.

assert a distinctly masculine association with work in response to a female interlocutor, in the case of at least one of Henry Curd's and Sidney Sorrell's interviews. Such strategies are legacies of nineteenth century associations of skill with manliness, mobilised then, as in the 1950s, in an endeavour to identify the workplace as a masculine space.<sup>28</sup> As Paul Thompson has observed, blue-collar workers remembering the 1950s and 1960s may have tended to overstate their jobs' intrinsic interest as a psychic strategy for presenting a meaningful sense of self-worth.<sup>29</sup> Paul Willis has discussed how post-war manual labour was tightly bound to conceptions of manliness.<sup>30</sup> But for middle-class Alan Birchwood too, there is comparable pride in his understanding of technique and skill, in an increasingly meritocratic white-collar workplace structure.<sup>31</sup> Michael Roper has observed similar tendencies among post-war managers, who divorced from the production line still retained a fascination with material products.<sup>32</sup> Common to all these experiences is a fetishisation of craftsmanship and practical skill, which as we shall see, manifested in home-based leisure activities too.

It is difficult to tell at the remove of a retrospective oral history interview how much of this detail was shared with wives and children on a day-to-day basis. Certainly, in the testimonies men were inclined to address topics of work and family life discretely. However, where men did forge emotional connections with between work and family was in their consciousness of being successors to their own fathers as breadwinners. Coming of age in mid-century Britain, with deindustrialization in process but many areas still dominated by heavy industry, the gradual transition from hard, manual labour to softer forms and office work was already underway. Born in 1930, Mike Saddington remembered proudly his father's progression to head weighman and traffic manager at local colliery, but equally the advice he received not to follow him 'down t'pit'.<sup>33</sup> Norman Livingstone, who was the same age as Mike and grew up in a mining household, was respectful of his father's physical strength, but also mindful of

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<sup>28</sup> Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, p. 3; McClelland, *Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan'*, p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Thompson, 'Playing at Being Skilled Men: Factory Culture and Pride in Work Skills Among Coventry Car Workers' in *Social History*, 13 (1988), p. 59. In Thompson's account, this is articulated through trackworkers assigning questionable labels of skill to their tasks.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Willis 'Shop-floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form' in John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds) *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (Routledge, 1979).

<sup>31</sup> See Savage, *Identities and Social Change*, p. 235.

<sup>32</sup> Roper, *Product Fetishism*.

<sup>33</sup> ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

his encouragement not to succeed him in the same industry.<sup>34</sup> Both men took flight to the Merchant Navy. Harry Tillett's father was another miner anxious that his son should not endure similar work; instead, Harry became a carpenter-joiner.<sup>35</sup> Whatever their fathers' jobs though, this older cohort of interviewees was appreciative of the work that had put 'bread' on their tables in the straitened inter-war years. They understood the hardships wrought by irregular employment and tough physical work. As Zweig observed in an earlier study, at the time, such awareness could prompt feelings of shame as well as pride in their fathers' work.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, a few years older than the swaggering young sharp-dressed workers identified by Young, Todd and Ayres, even those fathers glad to depart from their own fathers' field of work remained conscious of the labour undertaken to provide for them when they were children. As Strange found in the nineteenth century, 'the subjective elements of breadwinning provided a key motif for adult children trying to articulate what their father meant to them'.<sup>37</sup>

A generation on, though sons became still less likely to succeed their fathers in workplaces or industries, the vertical lineage of emotional association with their fathers' labour continued. We saw earlier the relish with which Henry Curd described his pattern making. His son Martin was equally effusive. 'It's not just patterns', he explained:

If you take the engine from a car - now that's a lump of cast iron. Now that's got to be made. Now what he used to make is the wooden outline of that, which would then be molded in sand for the metal to be poured in. He'd make the wooden shape of it that would then be moulded in the sand, they'd take the wooden one out, and then pour the cast iron in, or whatever metal they're doing it in.<sup>38</sup>

More broadly, he lamented diminishing value of the sort of skills and knowledge his father exemplified:

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<sup>34</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>35</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>36</sup> Referenced from Zweig's 1952 study 'The British Worker' in Kynaston, *Austerity* pp. 422-430.

<sup>37</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

I'm not sort of running down University people, but [my father's] job is using his hands, and actually making something, which you think, you build up over the years. You can't teach somebody something like that in a coupla' weeks, sort a thing... he could be teaching youngsters nowadays, but they don't wanna' know do they? <sup>39</sup>

Interviewed in the mid-1980s, his comments reflect the anti-intellectual and anti-managerial discourse discussed in Chapter Four; but they also betray a passionate filial pride. Even John Taylor, who as we have seen had a deeply problematic relationship with his parents and took a different professional path himself, was nonetheless respectful of his father's work as a motor mechanic, proudly asserting there to be 'dignity in labour'.<sup>40</sup>

As we have seen, the Avery brothers' reverence for their father's labour was symbolised by the brick wall, built by him, which remained outside their cottages as a memorial of his death in 1966. As Phil explained, their respectfulness for their father's work combined with feelings of anger about the extent to which it may also have contributed to his demise:

Yes, it was a very sad ending, really. And he'd worked hard, it was combination I think of that kidney failure plus, up to that point, he'd spent his whole life physically working like a Trojan. Absolutely. He was not sort of in the best shape to fight this kidney thing, and in the end, that did finish him off.<sup>41</sup>

His comments echo the myriad complaints of miners' families and factory workers about the impact of the work on men's health. They also reveal how sons' feelings about their fathers' labour could be complex and contradictory. Boys might be reverential of their fathers' physical endurance and skill but grateful of the growing opportunities available to them not to replicate their experiences. While conversations about heavy and dirty manual work did not typically enter home life as children were growing up, in later life sons, as adults, could become newly aware of the shadow it had cast on their families.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

<sup>41</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.



However, while the intrinsic aspects of men's work resonated psychically across life-courses and down generations, as far as post-war children were concerned, their fathers' work was overwhelmingly synonymous with their absence from family life. At the level of everyday family experience, Goldthorpe's emphasis on the *extrinsic* value of work is well founded. The more time fathers spent away at work providing financially for their families, the better husbands and fathers they were presumed to be. Accordingly, the decreasing number of hours men were required to work after the war did not correspond with the number of hours men actually worked. In 1965, the average working week had reduced to 41.4 hours, but the amount men actually worked, on average, was 47.3 hours.<sup>42</sup> In many industries, workers were in short supply to meet the production requirements of the post-war economic boom.<sup>43</sup> Across all the companies he investigated, Goldthorpe found overtime to be 'more or less institutionalised'.<sup>44</sup> In middle-class Woodford, Willmott and Young described a typical professional businessman as 'different sort of absentee husband... who spends nearly all his time out of the home not so much spending money as making it'.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, that overtime was commonplace for labourers and professionals alike. Long hours were often commented on in the oral testimonies of fathers and sons too. Andrew Coverley remembered that his father Peter, who was a woodwork teacher, was regularly out in the evenings teaching night-school classes to bring home extra income.<sup>46</sup> Harry Tillett's regular 45-hour week included Saturday mornings until 12-o'clock.<sup>47</sup> Henry Curd's reflections aptly explain why working longer hours was commensurate with putting one's family first:

Oh yeah, plenty of overtime. Yes, I used to do a lot. For quite a few years there was Saturday morning and Sundays, or all day Saturdays. If I had the chance to earn money I used to think oh, you must earn money, you gotta family, so you can give 'em a better standard of life ... It wasn't a case of work came first, but I always think if you can earn money, and you're not doing anything special, then earn the money so you can spend it

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<sup>42</sup> Gazeley, *Manual Work and Pay*, p. 62.

<sup>43</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>47</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

later on when you need it.<sup>48</sup>

There were exceptions. For some men, money earned during overtime was 'pocket money' to be spent at their discretion rather than contributing to the family budget.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, overtime provoked ambivalent feelings. It was offered so regularly that it gave men the confidence to use the proceeds to invest in houses, cars and holidays for their families; but equally, they remained conscious of the risk that it would be taken away, leaving long-term debts unable to be serviced.<sup>50</sup> As Selina Todd has argued, credit (or 'hire purchase') arrangements for those caught up in the fast-moving consumer society were laced with anxiety for many post-war families.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, there were also fathers whose absence from family life was more problematic. In his autobiography about growing up in working-class West London, politician Alan Johnson describes feelings of hostility and resentment towards his father, who spent long periods away from home with other women or frittering away much needed income in local pubs and clubs. Even Johnson, however, harboured a grudging appreciation of his father's occasional work as a pub pianist, which he claims influenced his own early attempts to forge a career as a musician.<sup>52</sup> His father's work identity remained a formative influence, despite persistent and harmful neglect. Such examples serve to underline the heavily gendered culture of work, parenting and conceptions of absence after the war. Moreover, as Andrew Davies has illustrated in the inter-war period, boys inherited their fathers' approaches to work selectively, adopting and rejecting 'competing notions of masculinity' that saw men inclined towards breadwinning and the family, or pubs and gambling.<sup>53</sup> If a man was too often absent for reasons other than work, he was deemed in dereliction of his family duties; but as long as he was at work, his absence was considered necessary and praiseworthy, recalling the 'devotional' nineteenth century fathers described by Strange. If a woman was absent

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<sup>48</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>49</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-75.

<sup>51</sup> Todd, *The People*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>52</sup> Alan Johnson, *This Boy* (Corgi, 2013), p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, pp. 31, 54.

at work, however, her capacities as a mother were more likely to be called into question.<sup>54</sup>

Post-war fathers were juggling two motivations: they had lived through a period when there had been a shortage of work, so understood the value of taking it while it was available; and they were also conscious of their families' more expansive needs in the post-war consumer society. But aside from the immediate extrinsic concerns of providing for their families, they also had emotional relationships with work, with upward and downward intergenerational resonance. Post-war fathers' approaches to work recalled their own fathers' endeavours, just as their sons would be conscious of theirs. Across generations, the absent breadwinner remained the ideal of adult masculinity against which all men were measured. But as we shall see, fathers' attitudes towards work were also transmitted to their sons via a range of practices in post-war family homes.

## **2. Fathers at Leisure**

While men's absence at work was a key structuring force of post-war families' lives, it was also the case that increased wages, improved housing and rising numbers of home owners and long-term council tenants combined to make the home a key site of men's leisure. As Stefan Ramsden has illustrated, communities were by no means wholly transformed; post-war men in Beverley, Yorkshire, for example, like their inter-war forbears, continued to participate in male-dominated pastimes, such as fishing, football and rugby, as well as drinking in pubs and clubs, just as they continued to spend leisure time at home with families.<sup>55</sup> However, what Goldthorpe described as increasingly 'privatised' living from the late 1950s and 1960s, with more money to spend on bigger homes, with gardens, in which men had greater financial and emotional investments, has some resonance.<sup>56</sup> By 1970, 60 per cent of British families either

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<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, pp. 190-191; Wilson, *The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain*, p. 207.

<sup>55</sup> Ramsden, *Remaking Working-Class Community*, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> Goldthorpe, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp. 97-98.

owned their own homes or rented them from the council.<sup>57</sup> Many of the fathers interviewed remembered distinctly the process of buying their first homes, which generally took place soon after marrying. Mike and Peggy Saddington bought adjoining flats for £1,350 in Jesmond, near Newcastle; Arthur Laws moved further out, into Teignmouth, paying £3,600; Alan Birchwood secured a mortgage then borrowed a further £2,650 to restore their Surrey house in 1960.<sup>58</sup> Andrew Coverley remembered that his father had paid £3,000 in 1952 to buy the family home in Cheshire.<sup>59</sup> The clarity with which fathers and sons alike remembered the cost of their homes 30 or 60 years after their families had purchased them reflected the significance of homes in family histories, and the pride of home-ownership, which for many fathers was a new phenomenon.

Possibly the biggest leisure trend to emerge from these new circumstances was DIY (do-it-yourself). In Willmott and Young's 1960 study of suburban Woodford, a whole section was devoted to 'The New Craftsmanship'.<sup>60</sup> They proclaimed:

Nobody could be skilled in all the jobs which fall to a modern husband – gardener, painter, paper-hanger, plasterer, carpenter, plumber, concreter, electrician, motor mechanic. But quite often he can pick up a good layman's knowledge of least some of these trades, mainly through trial and error, partly by reading do-it-yourself and gardening magazines, partly under instruction from relatives and other men at work.<sup>61</sup>

For Zweig, a man's property 'transforms [his] life in more than one way, giving him a part-time and spare-time job for life. Decorating and doing jobs around the house is a year-round occupation ... quite often the worker comes to work on Monday worn out from his weekend activities, especially from 'Do-it-yourself'.<sup>62</sup> Nor was DIY the sole preserve of home-owners; as more families became council tenants and fewer private

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<sup>57</sup> Home Ownership in the UK, 2017. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/data/housing/> [Accessed September 2018]. The numbers break down as follows: 16.2% own outright; 19.5% mortgage; 24.3% council.

<sup>58</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*; ELL10, *Arthur and Stephen Laws*; ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

<sup>59</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>60</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, p. 23.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>62</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, pp. 96-100, 127.

renters, many were able to embark on significant home improvements too.<sup>63</sup> Despite being keen, as Willmott and Young were, to also emphasise men's roles as parents, Zweig conceded that it was a man's house 'that becomes his baby which he nurses and it testifies to his achievement'.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Zweig's choice of metaphor provides an insight into our understanding of men's emotional yearnings across classes. Describing contemporary managers' needs, Roper emphasised:

the joy of making things...derived partly from the way it enabled them to appropriate 'feminine qualities, rendering women themselves superfluous. Women's servicing labours in the home and at work freed male managers to experiment through objects with the panoply of gender identities. Placing goods at the centre of their emotional and work life, the post-war generation expressed masculinity through sophisticated play.<sup>65</sup>

From these male subjective perspectives, we are able to observe the way categories of labour and leisure are collapsed at the level of men's psychic needs.

In Paul Thompson's study of post-war Coventry car workers, there was a clear relationship between what men gained through the pursuit of DIY and what they were losing in increasingly automated workplaces. Automation had deprived workers of the pride that skills learned in earlier phases of technological development had given them, and the control and autonomy of presiding over their own output. In the post-war factory, their options amounted to avoiding the assembly line ('trackwork') altogether, changing its character, or accepting it and '[putting] one's heart elsewhere'.<sup>66</sup> Although such strategies offered partial respite, the pervasiveness of trackwork and its monotony led men to seek alternative sources of fulfilment. One option was to stow away 'odds and ends' to take home for working on the cars of friends and neighbours. However, despite the autonomy this practice afforded workers, it remained thought of as 'work' – there was little interest in mending cars as a hobby.<sup>67</sup> More gratifying sources of compensation, Thompson argues, were to be found in practices of leisure, which he

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<sup>63</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 127.

<sup>64</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 128.

<sup>65</sup> Roper 'Yesterday's Model', p. 196.

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, *Playing at Being Skilled Men*, p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64; Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, p. 264-265.

categorises into four groups: those oriented around the body (particularly sport, fighting, sexual relationships and dancing); the natural world (such as gardening, allotments, walks in the countryside); human sociability (visiting kin or meeting friends and neighbours); and personal creative skills (particularly home improvements).<sup>68</sup> Of these, it was noted that activities centred on the body were generally the preserve of younger, unmarried men; of the attractions for married men, although meeting friends in pubs and clubs was by no means unusual, visiting kin was reserved for special occasions, such as Easter and Christmas. However, practices that involved personal creative skills (which along with home improvements also overlapped into the 'natural world' category in the form of gardening), were much more prevalent. Thompson described them as:

...a group of home-based activities, in which men – and only men feature in these memories – developed special craft skills in their free time. Sometimes they directly reflected work skills and attitudes. More generally, it seems likely that they were providing outlets for skills and creativity in making and producing things, which for most could no longer be fulfilled in mass production factory work.<sup>69</sup>

Projects ranged from making picture frames to painting and decorating to installing bathroom suites, to undertaking whole house renovations. Willmott and Young labelled such projects 'conspicuous production', in which work on homes became more 'psychologically rewarding' as life at work became more boring.<sup>70</sup> Ramsden described how DIY could foster 'neighbourly mutual assistance between men', offering alternative homosocial camaraderie to the changing world of work.<sup>71</sup>

Thompson's observation of men's gardening is also corroborated by the contemporary social research. Despite being an activity attracting participation by both sexes, it remained highly gendered. In Thompson's view, like DIY, it provided opportunities for displaced modes of work-related masculinity to be reasserted in the domestic space – whether oriented towards provision, with the growth of vegetables for

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<sup>68</sup> Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, pp. 252-265.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>70</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Ramsden, *Remaking Working-Class Community*, p. 11.

food, or in the competitive culture of prize vegetables and horticulture.<sup>72</sup> Again, particular habits would be carried over: one daughter remarked on her father's pride in the appearance and maintenance of his garden tools, which reflected the standards he maintained in his workplace.<sup>73</sup> Often, gendered dynamics of gardening were delimited in space. In post-war Oxford, John Mogey found that allotments operated quite distinctly from gardens attached to homes:

The allotment is something more than just a place to grow vegetables, however, it is in a sense a married man's club. The astonishment of one set of allotment holders at a woman who kept the allotment going for some months while her husband was ill is one sign of this. The husband said when he recovered: "It's a man's job. I'd rather she kept the garden. When I came out of hospital in August and we wanted some potatoes, she did come then, but I was terrified she was going to put the fork through her foot."<sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup>

The story was likely to have been exaggerated by participants in the research; however, it corroborates the idea that particular forms of gardening operated in exclusionary masculine contexts. It is redolent of the late-Victorian and Edwardian working-class gardens, in which the garden shed was an overtly masculinised space in which men spent time making and fixing domestic objects.<sup>76</sup> As Sophie Greenway had found in her study of mid-twentieth century gardening magazines and advice books, men exerted work-related modes of masculinity in gardens. She argues that boundaries of labour and leisure became blurred as men undertook projects involving structures, such as trellises, patios and seating, as well as growing plants, flowers and vegetables.<sup>77</sup>

Characteristically, Donald Winnicott thought these masculinised performances of domestic identity highly appropriate fatherly behaviour; they were practical, conditional and intrinsically connected to the world of work. 'How happy the children of a skilled craftsman', he mused 'who, when he is at home, is not above letting the

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<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, pp. 258-259.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>74</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. Interestingly, signalling a longstanding continuation of these attitudes, a similar dynamic is portrayed in a fictional early 2000s northern village in Jon McGregor, *Reservoir 13* (4th Estate, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 136.

<sup>77</sup> Sophie Greenway, *Masculinity, Domesticity and Power in New Suburban Gardens, 1930-70* (2018), *Twentieth Century Masculinities*, University of Birmingham.

children see the skill of his hands, and share in the making of beautiful and useful things'.<sup>78</sup> However, these were not the kinds of experience reflected in oral histories of Coventry, where 'the learning of male skills of any kind in and around the house from fathers was rarely remembered'.<sup>79</sup> Nor were they in Oxford, where concern about a garden's appearance precluded the involvement of children, lest they make it untidy.<sup>80</sup> In post-war Lancashire, Elizabeth Roberts observed that:

The separation of roles within many families meant that individual members could spend a lot of time physically apart; mother in the kitchen, the children playing outside, and father in his own particular space carrying out gender-related activities: carpentry, working with metal, doing repairs and gardening.<sup>81</sup>

In my own research, questions about the involvement of children in home-based leisure pursuits elicited a patchwork miscellany of interactions. Alan Birchwood and Bill Taylor each shared their mechanical skills with their tolerant, if not enthusiastic sons.<sup>82</sup> Martin Curd commented mournfully 'I'll never forget that', remembering the moment his father asked him to weed his allotment only for him to pull up all his onions too.<sup>83</sup> Norman Livingstone took woodwork evening classes and produced an African walnut room-divider, only for his son to collapse it onto their television while copying the gymnastics from that year's Olympics.<sup>84</sup> For most fathers, home improvement and gardening endeavours were undertaken for their own emotional needs and the desire to contribute to the functioning of the family home; not the intergenerational transmission of skills. They resulted from a combination of circumstantial needs and the opportunities of post-war affluence, an acceptance of mainstream cultural understandings of domestic gender roles, and an outlet for practical skills for which, for whatever reason, there was no longer so much call for at work. Nonetheless, men's performances of these sorts of skills did not go unnoticed by sons in families, whom,

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<sup>78</sup> Winnicott, *The Child*, p. 116.

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>80</sup> Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>81</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 40.

<sup>82</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*; ELL02, *Bill Taylor*.

<sup>83</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>84</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.



whatever their own inclinations, recognized the culturally pervasive modes of adult masculinity they represented.

These male leisure activities represented assertions of fathers' places in the domestic sphere, generally undertaken autonomously (with occasional help from friends, rather than family), but they were also forms of duty and devotion to the improvement of their families' lives. We saw in Chapter One how the material culture of the Birchwoods' living room triggered conflicting feelings of pride and regret for Mark, who both revered his father's DIY abilities and lamented his own shortcomings.<sup>85</sup> For his part, Alan recounted the renovation of their family home with a relish that echoed his description of his work as a mechanical engineer (see above). The following passage reveals how his performance of masculinity, which drew on skills of homecraft, afforded him domestic power in the process of purchasing a family home.

I think this one was about the fifth house we looked at... This floor went be-doing, be-doing... bounced up and down. There were slates off the roof... there was woodworm all over the floorboards, we'd got wet rot – all the ground floor was suffering from wet rot. What we didn't know at the time, was that the upstairs – one room was suffering from dry rot – that was a bit nasty. But erm... anyway, this place had been empty for several months, because its condition was so bad... and er... I got the keys, had a look around the place, lifted up a few floorboards... yeah, it's mother earth down there, that wants concreting over there... er... new floor perhaps. Wait a minute, if we just cut the rotten ends off the joists, and put another sleeper board in, we could use a lot of the timber... so we worked out a method of restoring this place.<sup>86</sup>

Alan's was not an aggressive or domineering expression of male domestic power. It was 'I' who 'got the keys'; but it was 'we' who could 'cut the rotten ends off', 'use a lot of the timber' and '[work] out a method of restoring this place'. The deployment of his practical skills was very much an investment in the collective family's future comfort and happiness. Nonetheless, the planning and execution of the work remained exclusively Alan's domain. Alongside the assimilation of Alan's exemplary knowledge, his son Mark went on to learn elements of woodwork, metalwork and plumbing from a

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<sup>85</sup> *Chapter One*, pp. 55-56..

<sup>86</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

combination of school and early jobs. However, Mark conceded that other skills, such as wiring, came from his father; not through any sort of formal learning process, but rather by osmosis. He explained: 'well I thought everyone could do it, and then I realised, no, that's stuff I learnt from my dad'.<sup>87</sup>

Alan's reflections on his own handiwork, the material evidence of which were all around him, were typical of men in interviews. Describing his own DIY exploits, Peter Coverley referred to the wall that had been knocked through and the staircase that had been rebuilt when he had first bought the house.<sup>88</sup> Even Charlie Henry, who comfortably had the means to employ others to do the work for him, nonetheless reflected proudly on his decorating skills, explaining the futility of asking Polish workmen 'because in Communist Poland they didn't have wallpaper'.<sup>89</sup> Harry Tillet's involvement in home improvements was substantial but conditional on the results meeting certain standards of machismo. He installed patio doors, a new fireplace, kitchen and bathroom; but despite also making beds and wardrobes, he had reservations about a table he had built: 'not too keen on it, no. It's too poofy for me'.<sup>90</sup> His remark recalls men's imagined threats to the 'normal' heterosexual gender ordering of family life discussed in Chapter Two. For Henry Curd, jobs around the home and garden were part and parcel of everyday domestic life. He explained, 'There was always something to do about the house. I could never understand these people who have to have hobbies, 'cause there's always something to repair or decorating to be done, or gardening to be done. I'm never looking round for things to do, never have done'.<sup>91</sup> His son Martin saw this attitude as coterminous with values of skill and quality he assigned to his father's work:

If there was cupboards needed, dad would always make 'em. 'Cos being a pattern maker, carpentry is all part of the trade. And some of his furniture is lovely. He does all the carving of it. He doesn't go out and buy carved edging to go on it, he makes it himself... Most of their units indoors, their glass cabinets, anything like that, he's made them all. They're not conti-board type, like most people use nowadays, it's proper wood.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>88</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037.

<sup>89</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>90</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>91</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

<sup>92</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Henry Curd reached for his own craftsmanship skills when grappling for the most appropriate terms in which to describe 'class'.<sup>93</sup> A generation on, Martin, a heating engineer, was pleased to have been able to continue the family tradition, installing the central heating in his own home 'because that's me' job'.<sup>94</sup>

In the Livingstone family, the association of DIY with masculine domestic identity was unmistakable but also nuanced. Norman, a draughtsman then engineer, successfully designed the family kitchen and bathroom and built a number of pieces of furniture around the home. However, he was at ease with the fact that his reputation owed more to the occasional transgression – the expensive coffee table that he sawed the legs off in order to shorten, or the unusable bird table to which he applied a varnish which produced an unfortunate mirror effect. As Norman pronounced, self-deprecatingly, 'my ability with a saw is well known throughout the family!'<sup>95</sup> For his son Stephen, however, his father's practical skills and inclinations represented a significant aspect of fatherly intergenerational transmission, the full appreciation of which only came to him in later life. After the laughter had died down following the recollection of the coffee table story, Stephen countenanced:

But that is important. Because I've come across lots of men in my career, who can't do things like that. Who don't have the DIY skills... they just think... oh, to hell... I'll just get someone in who can do it. ... I think, even now, I make things. I'm not a craftsperson, because I knock things together, but... it's just that feeling, that you are practically, as well as intellectually capable... and therefore, if I want to make something, I'll find a way to make it.<sup>96</sup>

Norman thought this attitude stemmed from an urge for autonomy: 'I've never had the attitude of, we can't have that... it's more, if we want it, we'll get out and do it. And if that means getting your hammer and nail out, and buying a bit of wood... so be it'.<sup>97</sup> The examples of fathers' practical handiwork took many forms, but most endured in the

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<sup>93</sup> Chapter Two, pp. 94-95.

<sup>94</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>95</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

material culture of family homes. Sons assimilated their skills subjectively, in ways that were often not fully appreciated until later in life.

Fathers' craftsmanship and autonomy also extended to family holidays. This period saw the two-week holiday, first in Britain and later abroad, become a realistic possibility for many families.<sup>98</sup> In 1952, two-thirds of manual workers were entitled to a paid holiday of twelve days or two weeks; and in 1965 more than 60 per cent of adults had two to three weeks paid holiday a year.<sup>99</sup> As Paul Thompson has observed, as far as the gender ordering of family life was concerned, holidays were merely an extension of circumstances at home, in which women continued to look after children and oversee the daily family schedule.<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, in most men's testimonies, fathers were more concerned with transporting families to holidays and enacting their masculine roles as protectors of their families than with taking part in day-to-day activities. We saw in Chapter One how Alan Birchwood's resourcefulness enabled him to adopt the role of leader and protector on holiday;<sup>101</sup> similar qualities were reflected in the testimonies of sons whose fathers took charge of tent building or tending to the practical elements of caravanning.

Most conspicuous though were men's roles in holiday journeys. While historians of holidays have identified the post-war period as signalling a surge in the gradual shift from mostly rail- to most road-based transport, little has been written about the detail of how such journeys were experienced.<sup>102</sup> Yet, as Niall Finneran has illustrated with reference to post-war changes to road networks, 'choreographed movement to the resort was all part of the wider experience of the holiday'.<sup>103</sup> When it came to choreographing individual family's journeys, fathers tended to take the lead. As the family members likely to be most closely acquainted with the family vehicle, fathers took responsibility for ensuring it was prepared for the expedition ahead. At a time

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<sup>98</sup> Niall Finneran, 'Beside the Seaside. The Archaeology of the Twentieth-Century English Seaside Holiday Experience: A Phenomenological Context' in *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 21 (2017), p. 540; Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, p. 248.

<sup>99</sup> John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (MUP, 2000), pp. 61-62.

<sup>100</sup> Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, p. 249.

<sup>101</sup> Chapter One, p. 65.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Walton, *The British Seaside*, Chapter Three.

<sup>103</sup> Finneran, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 540.

before motor vehicle regulations became stricter – before it was mandatory to wear a seatbelt, for example – and when vehicle owners still dealt directly with minor repairs and modifications, men would often be inclined to improvise in order to ensure that their family, luggage and assorted holiday paraphernalia all fitted in.<sup>104</sup>

Sons' vivid reflections of these preparations reveal the saliency of the whole holiday experience in memories of family life and the particular evocations of adult masculinity they fostered. Mark Birchwood's recollection of the holiday journey ritual was typical:

I don't think we had a new car, there was a lot of second hand cars, and dad had built this kind of platform in one of them, that filled in the gap between the back seats and the front seats. And then put cushions on it, so it was a kind of bed. So, we would get carried down at thee in the morning, dumped in this thing, then they would drive off, and then you'd wake up, and we would be in Honiton, which is in Devon.<sup>105</sup>

The practice of travelling overnight to destinations as children slept was commonplace at a time when car travel was relatively slow by today's standards, and before air travel became common. As Mark alludes to, it created the wondrous possibility of going to bed in one place and waking up in another, all under the protective oversight of their fathers. Norman Livingstone even managed to customise his motorbike and sidecar for trips away, as Stephen explained:

Me mum had the seat... and there was little more than a plank that I certainly sat on... I'm not sure what happened to me brother... anyway, it was a wooden construction. It did have windows but it was made out of, sort of, Plexiglas, which of course was yellow. So, you couldn't see out. And then of course, there's my dad on the outside, with his leather gear and his goggles, chugging along... at whatever it was, 40 miles an hour. So... yeah... and I remember me brother used to get travel sick in the sidecar.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, p. 249. Tebbutt notes that a practical understanding of one's vehicle, often born of economic necessity, was a "natural" part of working-class masculine culture'.

<sup>105</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>106</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

Steve Tillett remembered similar escapades; it was only when a nut came loose causing the sidecar to continue after the motorbike had stopped that they decided to invest in a family car.<sup>107</sup>

For many families, camping was a popular and cost-effective family holiday option, the associated equipment for which provided fathers with new challenges. As Roger Wilkins described, this necessitated the adaptation of a much larger vehicle:

we used to go camping. We used to go... my dad got a minibus and converted it, so we actually had seats, round the side. Totally illegal, wouldn't be allowed these days, no seatbelts or anything like that. We used to go with our camping equipment, tent, sleeping bags... food, we went abroad, Germany, couple of times. [We drove] through France, went... then a couple of times, Luxembourg...<sup>108</sup>

Roger's proud reflection that it was 'totally illegal' confirms the pleasure he took in his father having pushed the boundaries of risk in the family's interest. It also recalls his happy memories of driving his father's tractor, free from the surveillance of 'health and safety', which we saw in Chapter One.

As we have seen, John Taylor's memories of family holidays tended to rest on various traumas; however, his sensory recollection of camping trips in his father's immaculately maintained ageing car provided some respite:

My dad used to have an old Austin, an old Morris 8, a pre-war car. And I've got memories of being in that going camping... and everything was sort of piled up at the back and I'd be sort of squashed up, more or less against the roof on top of everything else, on the back seat. And we'd go... I remember the smell of that... lovely old sort of leather and oil smell, in that car... And that would get us down to... yeah, go down to Devon in that.<sup>109</sup>

Even in troubled relationships, the occasion of a holiday could foster happy feelings of excitement and adventure for sons. Holidays were increasingly important markers of

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<sup>107</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 141.

<sup>108</sup> ELL07, *Roger Wilkins*.

<sup>109</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*.

post-war leisure; they brought families together to participate in shared experiences facilitated by the post-war boom in motor vehicle travel and the growing domestic and continental tourism industry. Men's inclinations to spend their leisure time utilising practical skills on domestic projects were given another outlet by family holidays, which also enabled them to perform masculine modes of protection and managed risk. Such leisure contexts further blur the boundaries of work and play and provide particularly powerful gendered sites of emotional resonance for sons.

### 3. Sons at Leisure

Just as there were seldom reports of men playing with their sons on holidays, fathers were largely absent in most reports of childhood play in and around the home. While Laura King notes a cultural shift towards greater encouragement for fathers to play with their children across the early to mid- twentieth century, she also acknowledges that experiences were mixed.<sup>110</sup> There were educational dimensions to some parents' approaches to their children's play, such as the purchase of chemistry sets, but in general, childhood play was not remembered as an activity structured by adults. While Mathew Thomson is right to caution against the tendency towards nostalgia in memories of childhood 'lost freedoms', we should also pay heed to recollections of subjective childhood experiences in which adults have little or no place.<sup>111</sup> From children's perspectives, play and leisure owed more to personal agency and collective peer-group interaction than to adult direction. While fathers did tend to engage in their sons' leisure more the older they became, this pattern revealed more about fathers' limited involvement during infancy than the growing dependency of sons, who were in fact becoming ever more socially autonomous. Nonetheless, much of sons' play anticipated their adult masculine identities, for which fathers remained powerful real and symbolic markers. The same spirit of adventure with which fathers prepared for holiday journeys also characterised boyhood play; likewise, men's practical skills of craftsmanship were echoed in boys' inclination to make things.

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<sup>110</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 51-60.

<sup>111</sup> Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, especially p. 25.

Often, sons' subjective enterprises were experienced collectively, with other boys, as they explored local landscapes in search of adventure. In her study of children's spatial experiences in post-war Australia, Carla Pascoe draws on theories of children's geography to illustrate the way a challenging physical environment draws out dexterity, imagination, cognitive and verbal skills, particularly among those aged between six and 12.<sup>112</sup> Such skills also appear both implicitly and explicitly in the recollections of men recalling their boyhood experiences in post-war Britain. The environments themselves altered according to the locality of the home, but a sense of adventure can be detected across a range of contexts. For those in urban environments, such as Steve Tillett, Martin Curd, and Stephen Livingstone, adventure was sought with friends in disused buildings, areas of wasteland, old air-raid shelters and building sites, all which were in plentiful supply in the long shadow of the war and which provided the added frisson of danger and risk of getting caught. Indeed, the very fun of these escapades was dependent on the avoidance of adult supervision. Many boys also continued to participate in street culture, in a legacy of pre-war boyhood leisure behaviours.<sup>113</sup>

For those brought up on farms, such as Roger Wilkins and Arthur Winn, the materiality and topography of parents' work also provided the landscapes of childhood play; however, adults were no more likely to be present. The time Arthur illicitly took his father's tractor and 'rolled it' into a stream, aged nine or 10, remained a discomfiting story in Winn family lore. Other childhoods unfolded across landscapes in motion, as the process of urbanisation accelerated and new and expanding town developments encroached ever further into countryside. Melanie Tebbutt has lamented the absence of 'localised mobilities' in accounts of working-class uses of landscape, which have either focused on rambling in countryside or gang behaviour in urban settings.<sup>114</sup> The Avery brothers, growing up in a fast-expanding Sussex town, fell somewhere between the two. Phil was delighted that he and his friends had been 'totally spoilt by natural facilities available to us'.<sup>115</sup> However, such natural facilities extended to picking blackberries, fishing and apple scrumping, as well as exploring local streets and the town scrapyards.

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<sup>112</sup> Pascoe, *Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered*, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*. On interwar boys street culture, see, for example, Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, pp. 235-237; on post-war street culture, see Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, pp. 135-136. Thomson draws on Newsom and Newsom's post-war studies of children to illustrate how street culture continued up until the early 1970s.

<sup>114</sup> Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>115</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.



Indeed, Phil and Fred developed skills of ingenuity and craftsmanship by repurposing scrap materials for use as karts and rafts in their local countryside.<sup>116</sup>

Boys' practical skills and imaginations were also developed in more solitary home-based pastimes. Although a number of respondents remembered collecting stamps and reading, the most commonplace hobbies were collecting and building military models and figures.<sup>117</sup> In Chapter Four, we saw how Palitoy's Action Man figure, launched in 1966, provided a canvas of adult martial masculinity which boys could shape and distort as they conducted juvenile explorations of gender identity.<sup>118</sup> As Graham Dawson has shown, the masculine image of the 'soldier hero' has endured in modern British culture, but has been encountered by men and boys alike in highly subjective articulations of imagination and fantasy.<sup>119</sup> Dawson's understanding of his assimilation and contestation of this culture through processes of creativity and transgression was central to his coming to terms with his relationship with his father.<sup>120</sup> As Martin Francis has shown, men were engaged in parallel leisure activities, escaping to imagined homosocial worlds in books, films and objects of war.<sup>121</sup>

There were doubtless many sons for whom these toys provided imaginary access to their fathers' adult male world of active service. However, for many, impressions of war related more abstractly to an earlier generation of men, to which their fathers may have been too young to belong. Such interests lasted life-courses. Martin Curd's adult interest in collecting Second World War paraphernalia stemmed from a childhood reading *The Lion* comic, one of many pieces of post-war boyhood literature which celebrated military culture and stories of adventure.<sup>122</sup> An interest in military culture represented gender-normative behaviour for men and boys alike, which, as Dawson's work has shown, was subject to processes of negotiation for boys in the course of their entry into manhood. Dawson's experience rested on contrasting perspectives of a war film he and his father watched together. In the oral testimonies of post-war sons, fathers

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>118</sup> Chapter Four, p. 170.

<sup>119</sup> Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., especially p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> Francis, *Flight from Commitment*.

<sup>122</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043. On post-war boys comics, see Kynaston, *Austerity* pp. 504-505.

were non-participants in sons' war-focused play; but in playing, sons nonetheless anticipated modes of masculinity that reflected adult male lives.

Alongside military culture, sport provided another opportunity for masculine intergenerational connection. But, like military culture, it led to a variety of complex intergenerational experiences. Harry and Steve Tillet were both fanatical Coventry City football fans, but when Steve started going to home matches every week from the age of 10, he did so alone.<sup>123</sup> For Alan and Mark Birchwood, it was a shared *disinterest* in sport that helped them bond over their approach to 'rugger' at Mark's grammar school. Similarly, Alan Sorrell remembered neither parent to be a 'sporty type', but enjoyed playing board games, such as Tiddly-winks, Lotto or Snakes and Ladders with them.<sup>124</sup> For the Livingstones, sport provided an opportunity for mutual emotional benefit. Both Newcastle supporters, Norman and Stephen went to St James' Park just once or twice together, but Stephen's playing was a source of great pleasure for Norman who would go and see the school team. Addressing Stephen, he remembered, 'When I used to watch, and you'd do this famous sliding tackle... and I'd say – go on Steve, get stuck in!'<sup>125</sup> Norman's use of 'famous' recalls his description of his own 'well known' abilities with the saw in his DIY projects. The consciously lofty language in both narrations suggest that these talents continued to be afforded due significance in Livingstone family lore.

Stephen's interest in football, however, had as much to do with constructing a selfhood commensurate with contemporary peer group social norms as it did with following his father's example. Shy and arty, football provided an invaluable resource of mainstream boyhood masculinity, as he explained:

I mean football was a bit of a saviour for me, I think. Erm... because there was potential for being bullied – like I said there was rough kids about in the school ... The fact that I could kick a football helped me quite a bit. Because on the surface I looked quite a soft kid.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>124</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>125</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

Stephen Laws recalled similar feelings, which for him were linked to the physiological changes of adolescence:

When I was little, I was quite fat, so I wasn't really sporty ... I was little and fat for a lot of years... and when I turned 12, I became the size I am now. So, I became five foot eight, five foot six or seven, at 12 or 13, and got big all of a sudden. So, then I started playing rugby, because it was a rugby school... and you end up playing.<sup>127</sup>

For Charlie Henry, whose childhood diabetes prohibited his involvement in such boyhood sporting cultures, another masculine interest was necessary in their lieu. While the other boys played, he became proficient in carpentry and metalwork. His father Norman was proud of his son's early signs of being 'good with his hands'; in the interview, he was keen to record Charlie's school prize for a particular project.<sup>128</sup> Such examples reveal some of the ways in which boys' conceptions of their bodies and appearances interacted with prominent modes of childhood masculine expression. Football, rugby, metalwork and carpentry each anticipated adult male lives ahead. But, despite opportunities for shared intergenerational involvement, fathers' presence for these negotiations were patchy. Sons' everyday concerns had more to do with forming masculine selfhoods in defence from and collaboration with male peers. As Dave Russell observed of the *FA (Football Association) Book for Boys* in the 1960s, the editorial move away from a paternalistic tone reflected 'shifts within English (and, indeed, much of Western) society toward a childhood culture that increasingly had little space for adult influences, no matter how well intended'.<sup>129</sup>

Like sport and the military, motor mechanics was another interest that carried multiple lines of connection and disconnection across male generations. When Paul Thompson observed post-war teenage boys and young men tinkering with cars, engines or motorcycles, he concluded that they were 'playing at the future world of work'.<sup>130</sup> But not all sons fell into line. Harry Tillet's enthusiasm for motorbikes failed to rub off on

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<sup>127</sup> ELL10, *Arthur and Stephen Laws*.

<sup>128</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>129</sup> Dave Russell, '"Interesting and Instructive Reading"? The FA Book for Boys and the Culture of Boyhood, 1945-1973' in *Journal of Sport History*, 34 (2007), p. 231.

<sup>130</sup> Thompson, *Imagination and Passivity in Leisure*, p. 246. .

Steve, who never even learned to drive.<sup>131</sup> Stephen Livingstone was similarly indifferent towards cars and bikes, despite his father's keenness; although he did introduce his father to birdwatching, which became a source of great intergenerational interest.<sup>132</sup> For Martin Curd and his brother, their father's motorbike was simply a means of transport. Before he bought his first car, Henry would take his sons, one by one, down to the local river so they could go fishing. But he would not stay; once he had ridden them there safely, the father-son engagement ended.<sup>133</sup> For Mike Saddington, the age at which his son David became old enough to fish marked a turning point in their relationship. Unlike Henry and Martin Curd, Mike and David fished together; it was, as Mike explained, 'the first time we'd had much to do with each other'.<sup>134</sup>

As most of these sons came of age in the 1960s or early 1970s, their adolescences coincided with a more expansive available repertoire of popular music, fashion and youth subcultures than had been the case a generation earlier. Although, as John Taylor pointed out, participation in the 1960s counterculture and its aftermath was by no means obligatory: 'Nowadays I like to look back and think I was part of the swinging 60s but I wasn't. And I wasn't even part of the dreadful 70s either ... It happened to other people, the 60s.'<sup>135</sup> For Stephen Laws, being born in 1955 was 'a bad time', being 'just too young' for Beatlemania; however, he conceded that even in the 1970s he was not a great lover of pop music.<sup>136</sup> Mark Birchwood, born in 1960, had a much closer affinity with *The Beatles*, driven principally by the rude words he and his friends used to compose to fit the songs.<sup>137</sup> But his listening habits depended on his father's input. Alan had built an amplifier for their radio and if Mark wanted to listen, he had to wait for his parents as only they knew how to 'drive' it.<sup>138</sup> Stephen Livingstone also benefited from his parents' involvement; they would play The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Animals on their radiogram at home.<sup>139</sup> Such positive encounters

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<sup>131</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

<sup>132</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>133</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>134</sup> ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

<sup>135</sup> ELL01, *John Taylor*; Sandbrook, *Never Had it so Good*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. Sandbrook argues that this sort of reflection was the most common in post-war Britain.

<sup>136</sup> ELL10, *Arthur and Stephen Laws*.

<sup>137</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

support Gillian Mitchell's argument that even as early as the mid-1950s, certain artists were ripe for intergenerational appeal.<sup>140</sup>

David and Jack Shotton did not enjoy such opportunities for mutual appreciation. For a period, David collected every number one single, but his father 'didn't like that stuff – I was a big band man, Louis Armstrong ... real music'.<sup>141</sup> The generic gap between big band jazz and popular chart music reflects a classic intergenerational rift of the period. But Jack's and David's respective cultural interests were to find an alternative intersection in the spatial environs of local venue The Plaza, albeit at different historical and biographical moments. Jack had fond memories: 'Music was a big thing in them days... [there were] five dancehalls, and each had a band, you know. The Plaza, there was a 16-piece band there'.<sup>142</sup> Jack himself had played trumpet in a dance band – an interest which David inherited for a period as a child. A generation on, the nature of The Plaza had changed; the bands had gone, replaced by DJs and an ice-rink. But it remained a feature of David's adolescence. As was the case with younger childhood leisure interests, popular culture wove its way through intergenerational negotiations of masculinity, with particular and subjective inputs from fathers and sons alike.

#### **4. Sons at Work**

Many fathers took greater interest in their children's leisure activities as the younger generation approached adulthood. In the Henry family, Charlie's participation in particular pursuits was undertaken under the supervision of Norman, with the explicit aim of preparing the ground for his leisure life as a man. Norman's time with his son was severely curtailed by a combination of army work and boarding school. Once Charlie had reached a certain age, he decided to spend this time on activities such as fishing and shooting. When Norman was not there, Charlie was encouraged to work at a prestigious golf course – again with the intention that he immerse himself in the type of leisure culture that Norman hoped he would occupy in adult life. Norman explained:

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<sup>140</sup> Mitchell, *Reassessing 'the Generation Gap'*.

<sup>141</sup> ELL09, *Jack and David Shotton*.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

One time, we went down to Wales on a fishing course ... because my father was a very good fisherman and I wasn't. But I always thought, rather like my wife always wanted to play tennis, it wouldn't be a bad thing to learn to fish ... And I did my fatherly bit there ... You've got a shotgun and I had a shotgun, but I gave up shooting birds ... I think ... you want to prepare them for the next phase, and so the girls studied domestic science under their mother, how to boil an egg and so forth, and the boys, for instance, golf, he worked at Sunningdale for... but you know, it was a useful social skill to be able to play golf... or that was the theory, anyway, but you know, you were trying to prepare your children as best you could.<sup>143</sup>

As he makes clear, such preparations were highly gendered. Once again, Norman is exceptional in so far as he makes explicit claims to deliberate and overt interventions in Charlie's upbringing. As had been case with Charlie's education, such interventions were also made in the interests of continuing the family's participation in particular classed cultures. It did not matter that Norman himself had stopped shooting or that he was a poor fisherman, it was important to inculcate Charlie in these interests. In fact, fishing, golf and even shooting had degrees of cross-class appeal; but in the hands of the Henrys, they contributed to the gendered, intergenerational passing on of social privilege. Perhaps most importantly, familiarity with these particular homosocial pursuits might help facilitate a smooth immersion into the workplace cultures that Norman hoped Charlie would encounter as an adult.

For most other post-war families, thoughts about the relationship between their children's leisure and their work lives that lay ahead had more to do with avoiding a return to less prosperous times than with preserving financially comfortable lives. Having grown up during the 1930s depression or with war-time and post-war rationing, many parents had experienced some form of hardship or precarity. Theirs was a generation that both understood the value of work and recognized, with optimism, that the amount and variety of it available to their children would exceed the limitations of their own childhoods and adolescences. Many of their children were conscious of their parents' legacy but led lives framed by rising living standards and the growth of consumer spending, in which the likelihood of securing employment after education

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<sup>143</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

was high. In order to guard their children against complacency and help them make the most of the opportunities that lay ahead, many parents sought to instil in them a strong work ethic. It was no longer likely for earnings from childhood jobs to be required for household budgets, but such jobs remained opportunities for children to learn about the *value* of work. It was common for children to undertake paid work within the home, doing household chores, as well as external part-time jobs they would fit in and around school. Alongside these rehearsals for the world of work ahead, parents sought to inculcate the *mentality* of hard work and reward, often spontaneously, in a range of everyday interactions designed to transmit the idea of what one father described as 'you don't get anything for nothing'. Although not all sons took heed of such opportunities, most were aware of the importance parents placed on the sentiment behind them.

Growing up on his father's farm, the nature of Roger Wilkins' filial interactions shifted across the course of his childhood and adolescence. As we saw have seen he enjoyed moments of tenderness on his father's tractor as a young boy.<sup>144</sup> As Roger grew older, he would help his father with the harvest, in exchange for pocket money. Farm work altered the dynamic of Roger's relationship with his father, although the spatial and material environment remained the same. In previous generations, it might have marked the beginning of a journey towards filial succession; but agricultural decline and Roger's personal inclination combined to ensure Roger's farm-work was confined to his childhood. Nonetheless, the financial transaction helped shift his intergenerational experience further towards the realm of work.

Most fathers' work did not provide such ready opportunities so close to home, but often this did not forestall some sort of intergenerational exchange of labour for money. We saw earlier in this chapter that men did not use their leisure time and space principally to try and directly pass on skills. When conceived of as part-time jobs for their children, however, some fathers became more engaged. As more families acquired cars and homes with gardens over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, car-washing and lawn-mowing were ripe opportunities for fathers to oversee sons' labour. For Alan

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<sup>144</sup> Chapter One, pp. 61-62.

Sorrell, car-washing was a vital source of pocket money.<sup>145</sup> In his memoir, *And When Did You Last See Your Father* about growing up in 1950s Yorkshire, Blake Morrison devotes an entire chapter to car-washing, detailing sensory memories of freezing water, chamois leather and floppy hosepipe. His father's knowledge and authority dominates throughout: 'there's only one way to wash a car'.<sup>146</sup> Where there had been little utility in involving sons in homecraft or gardening projects, when it came to chores being completed in exchange for payment, these were treated as appropriate opportunities for introducing sons to cultures of work.

Inculcation of a strong work ethic arose in a variety of interesting and unlikely circumstances. For example, it was telling that Mike Saddington reflected on his own 1930s upbringing in the following anecdote about David's journey to school:

I suppose that's something where it rubs off a bit – when David started at Heaton, and we lived near West Jesmond station. It meant that he would have to go along Osborne Road to Jesmond Road, and then get the trolley for the first part and have to get the bus, because he said – how am I going to get to school dad? I said why don't you walk? He said... Anyway, we talked about it and I said – I'll tell you what I'll do – I can't remember how much it was, but say it was going to cost tuppence a day, or four pence a day, or whatever it was for fares... I said – if you walk, I'll give you half your bus fare – And it was always known as 'walking money', you see? And every Friday he used to be waiting there for his walking money you know? I think it was probably partly the way I had been brought up, like, you know. You have to do things for yourself. And so, David did that, and then Isobel followed on, she used to do that, and they didn't used to go all that way round, they used to go down the bottom of Jesmond, into the Dene, up the other side, to Paddy Freedman's, you know to Heaton school. And my youngest son, he did the same, and they all got walking money.<sup>147</sup>

Mike's strategy reaped rewards. In a separate interview, David explained: 'However much I dislike work, I've always thought you've got to work, you've got to pay your way. Er... so that I definitely got from [my parents]'.<sup>148</sup> Mike went on to explain proudly that

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<sup>145</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>146</sup> Blake Morrison, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* (Granta Publications, 2009), pp. 94-95.

<sup>147</sup> ELL12, *Mike Saddington*.

<sup>148</sup> ELL11, *David Saddington*.



his daughter Isobel had executed her own version of the strategy with Mike's grandson. A staunch Newcastle fan, he was faced with a dilemma when Isobel insisted that he work in order to partially pay for his season ticket; because the only jobs available were on Saturdays, clashing with Newcastle's matches every other week. Isobel held firm, and her son managed to find a job working in corporate hospitality at local rivals Sunderland, whose home games always coincided with the weekends that Newcastle played away. For Mike, his grandson's ignominy of being a Newcastle fan working in corporate hospitality at Sunderland's Stadium of Light was proof of a successful transmission of a strong work ethic across four generations.

In another unlikely scenario, Mark Birchwood's abiding memory of his father's inducement to work for reward concerned an interaction Alan had with other children on a family holiday.

We went to Plymouth... going swimming, and so we were all queuing up to go into the swimming pool, and back then it was like sixpence, or whatever it was to get into the swimming pool, and these two lads would come along and say – excuse me mister, have you got any money to... we haven't got our money to get in – and they were trying the whole queue, and they got to my dad and... this other feller, Graham, Graham Sparks. And they didn't just give them... they said they'd got to make them work for it, or something... so they made them run over to that tree and back as fast as they could. And then they gave them sixpence so they could get in.<sup>149</sup>

Examples of sons' memories of their fathers' behaviours with other children were rare; but Mark's recollection powerfully illustrates how men remained role models to their children, even when not directly addressing them. As we saw in Chapter Two, the male intergenerational relationships in the Birchwood family had been bound by a common connection to the Scout movement. In the above example, Alan betrays the sort of middle-class paternalistic drive which, Melanie Tebbutt has argued, prompted many middle-class men to become involved as leaders of working-class boys' associational groups.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> ELL05, *Mark Birchwood*.

<sup>150</sup> Tebbutt, *Being Boys*, pp. 48-49.

Inevitably the work ethic message did not always get through. The temptation of complacency born of rising livings standards and greater economic security saw some sons decisively *discontinue* their intergenerational inheritance of hard work. As we saw earlier, Harry Tillet had remarked on how influential it had been to see his father work long hours as a miner and continue to be active at home, pottering about in his shed. His son Steve's experience, however, was different. Born 1953, Steve came of age when an increasing number of alternative lifestyle choices were becoming available. Single, and having worked in a variety of short-term jobs in order to pay for stints of overseas travel, Steve reflected in the mid-1980s on his discomfort with not having inherited his parents' hardworking approach to life:

I don't like working, I really don't. It gets in the way, it gets in the way of enjoying yourself, you know, so if I had a lot of money, that would be... that sort of bit of conscience I have about... probably the fact that I don't conform to the work ethic, you know, it sort of pricks my conscience. I feel like I ought to be, you know, I ought to. I owe it to my generation or my previous father's generation or whatever... my parents, because they worked so hard.<sup>151</sup>

Steve's conscience being pricked at not living up to the standards set by his parents only underlines the saliency of a strong work ethic in transmissions of post-war parenting. His testimony also alerts us to the cracks that were appearing in the once idealised nuclear family model by the late 1960s and early 1970s, despite the endurance of the male breadwinner–female homemaker convention for many of those who married.

We can see from some of these examples that inheritance of a strong work ethic crossed gender, as well as generational, boundaries. Mike Saddington was proud that his daughter Isobel, as well as his son, David, inherited the mentality that hard work brings rewards. In Steve Tillet's confession, he mentions first his 'father's generation' but later broadens his description to 'my parents'; in fact, his mother returned to work for the General Electric Company (GEC) when Steve turned 16. For Stephen Laws, it was his mother to whom he owed his impetus to work hard, whereas his father had been

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<sup>151</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 141.

more 'laid back'. The eldest of six siblings, Stephen described her as the 'enforcer of the whole family'. As we saw in Chapter Four, When Stephen was a boy, his mother had run the household alongside working as a dinner-lady to pay for Stephen's school fees.

Stephen explained:

I have to say, I think I've inherited my mother's work ethic. Very strangely, thinking about it. Since I was about 14, I've always worked, worked in the supermarkets, packing up the boxes... always found... well you could in those days... student labour... worked loading and unloading cars, unloading bags on the ferries.<sup>152</sup>

There seems little doubt that Stephen's mother was a powerful role model for hard work and sacrifice. Nonetheless, Stephen's choice of 'strangely' to describe this influence betrays some discomposure at having inherited his attitude to work from his mother rather than his father. In Summerfield's formulation, this was a discursive script which sat uneasily with his personal biographic narrative.<sup>153</sup> Stephen, like his father, became the main breadwinner in his family, but his mother's hard work outside as well as inside the home, along with his father's relaxed attitude, prompts him to reassess the place of work in the Laws family's gender order.

There was a comparable disruption in the Sorrell household. Alan's father's job as a window cleaner and occasional machinist provided insufficient income for their family and, consequently, some of Alan's most vivid memories are of his mother's work and his own involvement in it.

*Alan:* ...Famous for the clips and the press-studs. Well, what we used to do, we used to fetch them from Newey's and we used to be called outworkers, what they classed as outworkers, and in them days you was glad to get a penny or two, anything in them days, and we used to go and fetch 'em in these chinboxes, used to be full of press-studs, all sizes from anything like that down to a small one, and they'd give packs of cards and all that and they used to give you a board, right, and on this board there used to be pressures for the sizes of the press-studs. So, put the press-studs onto

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<sup>152</sup> ELL10, *Arthur and Stephen Laws*.

<sup>153</sup> Summerfield, *Dis/composing the Subject*; Chapter Three, pp. 148-149.

this piece of plywood or hardwood, shake 'em, and put the bottom halves of the press-studs in, put the card on and you have to press the things on it and you used to have impressions on your thumbs here and your fingers, you know, and it was - yeah, it was absolutely murder. Anything - bit of pocket money used to help you. I used to push 'em - the old pram I used to be a baby in, I used to shove - fetch that up to Newey's and fetch the studs.

*Interviewer:* You must have done millions if you had a pramful?

*Alan:* Oh, millions and millions! Mother and I used to do it. Millions we used to do, day in, day out. When I used to come home from school, I'd - and mother would say I've got to get these done, can you help me, and you'd put things on your thumbs and - oh God! Mind you, the clips was the hardest one. The clips on the packets, you know, them was harder than the studs. We used to get stuck in and do it, You'd gotta in them days to make ends meet.<sup>154</sup>

Like Stephen's, Alan's memory illustrates that while most men spent more time at work than parenting, many mothers were still juggling the demands of being the primary caregiver with part-time, or in some cases full-time, work. Such examples lend weight to the argument that women's work affected the intra-familial power dynamics of gendered and generational relations. One of the older sons in this study, Alan's testimony also reminds us that in the less affluent late 1940s and early 1950s, children's labour might still contribute towards helping 'to make ends meet' (although he concedes that some earnings were left over for pocket money).

Sons' work around and beyond the home was a significant aspect of childhood and adolescent life. It provided opportunities for parents of both genders to introduce the mentality and culture of work to their children before they entered adulthood. However, the normativity of male breadwinning made sons' experiences of work more likely to anticipate their full-time roles as adults. These intergenerational processes while children remained under parental supervision were invaluable for parents who were mindful of their own parents' hard work; they were also formative for children for whom new, more expansive work opportunities lay ahead.

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<sup>154</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

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Both parents were strongly invested in the lifestage at which sons left education and entered full-time employment. For fathers in particular, however, the opportunity for empathetic connection at this moment was often unsurpassed. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, it was also an opportunity that required patience and imagination. Summing up the centrality of work and family to masculine identity, Roper and Tosh have suggested that 'one of the most precarious moments in the reproduction of masculinity is the transfer of power to the succeeding generation, whether it be within the family from father to son, via apprenticeship in the case of skilled workers, or by 'palace revolutions' in business.'<sup>155</sup> 'Precarious' is an especially apt word to describe post-war successions. After the war, fewer sons were following their fathers into the same trade and, concomitantly, fathers' influence, in terms of knowledge and connections, was also diminishing.<sup>156</sup> Their feelings ranged from resentful alienation in new workplace environments to enthusiasm about their sons' white-collar prospects, with which they could forgo the misery of hard industrial labour.<sup>157</sup> As we saw earlier, the fabled paternal entreaty not to go 'down t'pit' had greater impetus post-war as alternative career opportunities became more widespread.<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, there remained many sons who continued to succeed their fathers in their place of work or wider industry.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, it was reported that on some shop floors, sons were reluctant to work with their fathers because of the high standards they had set.<sup>160</sup> As we saw earlier in this chapter, alongside the swaggering young workers full of defiant teenage confidence, there were many who were quietly respectful and appreciative of their fathers' labour, even if their own paths were destined to lead elsewhere.

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<sup>155</sup> Roper and Tosh, *Introduction: Historians and the politics of masculinity* p. 17.

<sup>156</sup> Brooke, *Gender and Working Class* p. 784; Todd and Young, *Baby-boomers*, pp. 456-457; Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, 99-100, 103.

<sup>157</sup> Todd, *The People*, p. 222.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217; Kynaston, *Austerity* pp. 422-430.

<sup>159</sup> See, for example, Thompson, *Family Myth, Models, and Denials*, p. 24. Thompson found over two-thirds of his 100 families transmitted one or more occupations over at least three generations.

<sup>160</sup> Zweig, *The Worker*, p. 170. On the intergenerational dynamics of apprenticeships in the nineteenth century, see McClelland, *Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan'*, p. 81; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, p. 129.

In some respects, close analysis of work-related coming-of-age experiences broadly support Laura King's argument that rather than wishing sons to follow directly in their footsteps, fathers instead harboured more generalised hopes and aspirations for their children's future happiness and security.<sup>161</sup> However, taking into account both generations' perspectives, we can also see some of the variance and contestation of individual sons' passages into the adult world of work. Parents' views on potentially suitable occupations were not always offered, and when they were, not always acted upon. Some fathers' influences were all powerful; others found their advice went untaken. In some cases, it was necessary for a series of exploratory occupations to be undertaken before more long-term arrangements were made; other sons made the transition from education to work with little complication. In certain father-son relationships, quite contrasting perspectives emerged about the state of the son's work and career; some fathers were still coming to terms with their sons' employment choices well into later life. Post-war society provided a rich array of choice for a new generation coming of age. While in general it is reasonable to assume that this choice fostered a mood of cautious optimism, the breadth of opportunities available to children nonetheless made demands on parents' capacities for flexibility, patience and understanding.

Peter Coverley's reflections certainly appeared to support the idea that post-war parents were more open-ended and supportive than controlling and dogmatic:

I don't think we had ever any set ambitions, except to see them do reasonably well and take some sort of place in the world. I don't think we were out after success for them – you know, big success. If it had come I suppose it would have been all right, but I don't think we would have approved if they had got success at any cost, by any means. I don't think that that would have pleased either of us at all. It wouldn't have pleased me, that's for certain. In fact, I think when Andy was doing quite well at one point, when he was working in Wigan, we weren't terribly pleased because we didn't like the bloke he was working for, or working with, who we regarded as something of a heel, as he turned out to be.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> See King, *Family Men*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>162</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 037.

In fact, Andrew had decided upon a distinctly peripatetic early career. After being suspended, then dropping out of school in Cheshire, he went to London seeking work as a drummer. Upon returning after a year, his job as a lab assistant was cut short when he was dismissed for persistent lateness. After a short spell in the menswear department of a clothes store he went into nightclub management before becoming a roadie, and eventually settled on a career as a sound engineer. At the time of his interview in the mid 1980s, he was about to go on tour with Sade, the chart-topping soul singer.<sup>163</sup> The omission of these details from Peter's account is by no means disingenuous, but his sanguine and supportive tone betrays what was probably a turbulent period for the family. Andrew's itinerant experience of employment through the 1970s would have also been difficult to imagine a generation earlier when his father first set out on his career path.

Steve Tillett, who as we saw earlier had his conscience pricked at not emulating his parents' work ethic, had a similarly promiscuous work-life to Andrew Coverley. Essentially, Steve worked only to fund his love of travel. After three and half years as a shipping clerk, he took on a series of short-term contract positions, including hotel and office work, window cleaning and a spell at a Kibbutz, which each paid for a subsequent spell travelling. At the time of interviewing, he was out of work, receiving benefits. In a separate interview, his father Harry explained that Steve was looking for work, but there was not any available. Given that the interviews took place in the mid-1980s amid high unemployment, this explanation seems plausible. However, Harry's impression of his son's working life did not reflect the happy, live-for-the-moment attitude that Steve evinced. Harry's wife was also present for his interview, and it was her slightly muddled reflections that revealed some of the ambivalence they clearly felt towards Steve's way of life. In response to a question about hobbies, she cut in and said, 'If you ask Steve what his hobby is, he says he thinks it's working'.<sup>164</sup> It is difficult to be sure without the recording, but it appears that this remark is intended as a joke – Steve spends so much time at leisure, working is treated as no more than a pastime. Later, asked how Harry's work influenced their family life, she replied:

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<sup>163</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 038.

<sup>164</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 140.

Well, I think – well, Steve especially, he likes to be doing something all the time, doesn't he? If [Harry] just sat about doing nothing all the time, say watching... I think Steve would have... I don't know. I think it's just encouraged them to work. Carol likes to as well. We all do, all four of us do. Don't like to sit for long, you know, we'll all find something to do. If I'm sitting, I'll be knitting, you know.<sup>165</sup>

Again, the transcript fails to convey exactly Steve's mother's tone. 'Say watching...' and 'Steve would have...' are left hanging, before she changes tack to insist that she and Harry 'encouraged them to work'; work was something 'all four of us do'. However, as Steve testifies, such a statement must have been born more of hope than expectation.

After attending boarding school in rural Yorkshire, Edward Winn came of age in the early 1930s, by which time his family had moved to Scotland. Edward wanted to train to be a vet but his father, who was a banker, thought it not a 'proper' career so instead sent him to work at a woollen mill, aged 16, so that he might work his way up in business from the bottom. However, it quickly became apparent that he was allergic to wool, so he embarked on a series of casual jobs on farms before eventually going to agricultural college and becoming a farmer. Edward was less particular than his own father had been about his choice of career for his son Arthur. Nonetheless, Arthur was unsettled by his parents' encouragement towards an interest in livestock, when all he wanted to do was play with the tractor engines. Edward expressed some enthusiasm for Arthur to take over the family farm because his other son had been left permanently disabled by a childhood accident, so would never have been able to. When Arthur eventually moved to Manchester to be a police officer, both parents were a little disappointed: Edward, because farming was set not to be continued in the family; and his wife, because of concerns about the danger of police work. At one level, the Winns story is one of declining agriculture and downward social mobility; but at another, it conveys two generations of fathers' thwarted attempts to influence their sons' careers.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 160; SN: 4938-1 Interview 159.



In other parent-child relationships, the break from parental advice or example elicited less upset. Sidney Sorrell wanted Alan to be a draughtsman, while his wife would have preferred him to be an upholsterer.<sup>167</sup> Alan chose instead to follow his older friends' examples and get a job at the tube works. He ended up becoming a carpenter-joiner, to no apparent consternation on behalf of his parents.<sup>168</sup> In the Saddington family, David reflected that it was 'such a load off my mind' when he eventually decided to reject his parents' appeals for him to join the Navy, as they had done a generation earlier. Nonetheless, he heeded his father's advice not to do manual work, instead becoming a Business Studies teacher, after a spell as an accountant.<sup>169</sup> Martin Curd, whose desire to emulate his pattern-maker father led him to reject the opportunity to go to grammar school at 11, took a different path when the time came to enter the workforce. After a spell at the Gas Board, he set up his own business as a heating engineer. He remembered his parents not directing him towards any career in particular; rather, just to 'get on and improve me'self with it'.<sup>170</sup> Henry described himself as thoroughly satisfied with the way things worked out for his sons: with Martin, because of his drive to set up on his own; and with his brother Roger, who became a foreman in a pattern shop, just like his father.<sup>171</sup>

Norman Henry was also highly satisfied with the route Charlie took into the adult world of work. As we saw earlier, he had been sure to take steps to 'prepare [him] for the next phase' when Charlie was a boy. His paternal interest extended to his career beyond school, as Norman explained:

Well I think... I expect in those days, that when you'd just graduated you were thinking of making some money. We lived in the southeast, and your peer group were making money in the City. When he joined... if he'd gone into an industrial company in Birmingham he might have got 10 grand a year. At 26 or 27 in the City he might be getting four or five times that. So, I suspect money was a factor... because nothing could

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<sup>167</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 132.

<sup>168</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 133.

<sup>169</sup> ELL11, *David Saddington*.

<sup>170</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 043.

<sup>171</sup> SN: 4938-1 Interview 042.

be worse than working for Ford's in Dagenham putting on the front left-hand wheel every day, you know.<sup>172</sup>

As he had in relation to most aspects of Charlie's life, Norman explicitly located his expectations for his son's early career in opposition to his counterparts lower down the social order. In reality, it was inconceivable that Charlie would have begun his career at 'Ford's' or in an 'industrial company'; but such rhetorical short-hand was necessary to confirm that Charlie would have aspired to more exalted wealth and status. Once again, Norman was also conspicuous in his level of intervention to ensure such expectations were realised. An underwriter at Lloyd's of London, he duly secured Charlie interviews at four highly regarded companies, one of which led to a lucrative career in financial insurance.<sup>173</sup> As Norman proudly went on to explain, Charlie 'was making more money at 25 than his father was!'<sup>174</sup>

Norman also saw Charlie's passage from education into work in strictly gendered terms. Assumptions that boys and girls were destined for different roles in adulthood were implicit in most fathers' testimonies, but explicit in Norman's. In fact, as we saw in Chapter Four?, Norman imagined his daughters to be more interested in 'finding a suitable swain' than undertaking a university degree.<sup>175</sup> Asked for his thoughts on his daughter's careers compared with those on his son's, he deflected the question twice before finally answering:

One of them I think she wanted to be a glassier – very artistic, still is... wanted to be a glass engraver but she became a secretary or something, you know. And the other one worked in a shop selling pictures and so on. I can't remember what they did, but they lead a pleasant social life.<sup>176</sup>

He later explained that '[Women] didn't all go out to work because they wanted to make money for the mortgage... I mean by and large, the wives stayed at home, if you were in

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<sup>172</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> ELL08, *Norman and Charlie Henry*.

our privileged background, so to speak.<sup>177</sup> The vagueness with which Norman recalls his daughters' early careers and his emphasis on the quality of their social, rather than working lives stands in sharp contrast to his recollection of Charlie's first job, in which he took a particular and personal interest. He also underestimates the expansion of career opportunities available to women across the class spectrum over this period.<sup>178</sup> As we saw in Chapter Two, his concern with the reproduction of class privilege was intimately entwined with the reproduction of patriarchal structures of work and family life. By no means were such conceptions of the gender hierarchy the sole preserve of the upper-middle-classes. Nor were the working-classes immune to practices of nepotism (as Paul Thompson has observed of post-war Coventry factories in which fathers continued to wield influence over their sons' careers despite rising unionisation).<sup>179</sup> But nonetheless, Norman's subjective experience of his children's entry into the workforce illustrates how notes of intergenerational continuity in the upper-middle class could contrast with the changes at play elsewhere in society. It also reflects how Norman, like other fathers, increased his level of paternal interest and engagement around the time his son came of age.

The retrospectivity of oral history testimony lends a further dimension to fathers and sons' feelings about the choices sons made. We saw in Chapter One how important succession in family business was to the longstanding closeness of Jack and David Shottons' relationship, born of a shared interest in industrial craftsmanship and symbolised in the material form of Jack's extractor fan invention.<sup>180</sup> We also saw how a brick wall built by Fred and Phil Averys' father had come to represent an enduring embodiment of his skill and devotion to his family. But the brothers' subjective interactions with their father's labour produced mutually contrasting career choices. In their late teens, Fred and Phil both assisted their father on various building sites.<sup>181</sup> Phil remembered being 'in my element' driving the dumper trucks under his father's supervision, but it was Fred who detailed at great length the tasks he managed to

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> See, for example, Abrams, *Mothers and Daughters*; Delap, *Knowing their Place*, p. 139; Heron, *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the 50s*.

<sup>179</sup> Thompson, *Playing at Being Skilled Men*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>180</sup> Chapter One, pp. 53-54.

<sup>181</sup> ELL03, *Fred and Phil Avery*.

complete. Each recitation was often punctuated by memories of his father's understated praise, which Fred clearly held dear. For example:

Dad just took me on there, as, well, you know, do as best you can but you're not going to get paid for it. You might learn something by doing it, and so on, so the next thing, after I'd built this huge great big chamber, was, you know, he said –well you've made a fairly good job of that – he said.<sup>182</sup>

Destined for a career in building and construction himself, albeit as a white-collar quantity surveyor, the memory of Fred's time with his father on building sites had become increasingly poignant over the period since his death. Phil's memories were less detailed, but as it became apparent, his skills and ambitions were less clearly formed by late adolescence. Finding him 'messaging about' with cables, torches and batteries one day, his father had proclaimed 'That's it! Electrician!', having in mind an uncle who could arrange an apprenticeship at the local electricity board.<sup>183</sup> But Phil could only tentatively embrace this opportunity. After struggling as a self-employed electrician, he eventually found his vocation as a driver and carer for children with special needs – a profession much further removed from his father's sphere of understanding – long after his father's death.<sup>184</sup> Phil's stuttering early career had echoes of his faltering experience at school following his mishap with the 11-plus exam paper.<sup>185</sup> In his personal life too, it was also only after changing career that he met his wife and adopted her children, long after Fred had married and had children of his own. Phil and Fred shared a reverence for their father, and his labour, which appeared to have grown deeper with the passing of time since his death. However, their contrasting education, career and life paths illustrate the way intergenerational father-son affinities and departures can produce different subjective experiences, even within the same family.

Mark Birchwood was another son who had a complicated relationship with his father's – and whole family's – legacy. We have seen how the Birchwood family's tradition of 'high achieving' had prompted Mark to reflect on his relative

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Chapter Four, p. 173.

shortcomings.<sup>186</sup> Alan had worked hard at nightschool to compensate for an education lost to the disruption of wartime, while his sister studied at the University of Cambridge before getting a prestigious job at with the renowned codebreakers at Bletchley Park. Alan's reflections on Mark's pathway from education into work appeared to reinforce this family dynamic:

[He] passed his A Levels... at Reigate Grammar... thought he would go into dentistry – pays very well you know dad! – then after a bit he decided that... – I don't know if I could spend all day looking into people's mouths dad – So we said – well what else could you go into with what you've done? And it turned out that microbiology would be open to him, so he studied microbiology at er UCL... erm... did tolerably well... er... [pause] 2:1. As my friend said – worked just hard enough to pass his exams and have a good time doing it! [laughs]<sup>187</sup>

After failing to secure a career in microbiology, Mark went on to do different menial jobs including cleaning and basic administration.<sup>188</sup> Eventually finding work in the commercial heavy industry sector, where at the time of interviewing he was in middle-management, Alan's appreciation was accompanied with some misgivings: 'He seems to quite... I don't know, I'm not sure how much he enjoys the job but it pays quite well, and technically it's quite interesting.'<sup>189</sup> Mark was more forthcoming: 'I think perhaps they thought I was going to do better in my career than I managed, but... oh well... so yeah, I'm not going to set the world alight, you know, with any of that sort of stuff [laughs].'<sup>190</sup> The use of *they* to allude to his parents' imagined views contrasts with the *we* in Alan's testimony (*we* said, what else could you go into...). The parental alliance of benevolence and support in Alan's account was transposed to a sense of intergenerational distance in Mark's. Not for the first time, Mark spoke from the perspective of later life to lament his perceived failings in relation to his father's example.

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

<sup>188</sup> On the expectation for middle-class sons to follow their fathers in terms of career status, see Pahl and Pahl, *Managers and their Wives*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>189</sup> ELL04, *Alan Birchwood*.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

One of the most dynamic life-long negotiations of work inheritances emerged in the Livingstones' testimony. Norman, who in his own adolescence had taken the opportunity to break with his family's mining tradition and apprentice as an engineer, exemplified parental open-mindedness and belief in a strong work ethic: 'All through their life, I used to say... no matter what you do, enjoy it. If you're the bin-man, enjoy it. And if you work hard at that, you'll get to the top of the tree and you'll have a good life sort of thing, no matter what you were doing.'<sup>191</sup> However, when his son, Stephen, decided to become an artist – a career with uncertain routes to self-fulfilment and success – Norman's open-ended endorsement of hard work was challenged. He supported his son's studies at art school, while harbouring concerns about how a career in art would pay. Stephen explained, 'they had to learn that what's best isn't necessarily material. They're from a generation who didn't have much though.'<sup>192</sup> Eventually, Stephen arrived at a partial compromise, becoming an art teacher, while remaining a practicing artist. Interviewed alongside his father in 2017, he conceded to Norman 'In a sense you were almost right really – "how do you make a living of it?"'<sup>193</sup> Despite having deviated from a conventional occupational path, Norman's concern with making work pay had stayed with Stephen throughout his life.

More intriguingly, it transpired that a shared interest and skill in drawing when Stephen was a child had had implications the extent of which only emerged years later. Norman remembered:

From our point of view... I wasn't arty at all – art to me was something I didn't know anything about. I used to design things which are considered artistic, but I didn't think that. I didn't get with art at all. But Steve could always see something that I hadn't seen. When he did a drawing... I thought, gosh I hadn't noticed that before... [addressing Stephen] where you did... and you used to draw your Napoleonic wars thing... great battles... just little things, like the bayonet doing that... [Stephen laughs] ... it's true. And I thought gosh that's so right, and yet I wouldn't have drawn it that way, personally. So, Steve's mind, or his eyes or his brain were different to mine from an art point of view.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> ELL13, *Norman and Stephen Livingstone*.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

Yet, however unwittingly, Steven's aptitude for art had in fact been informed by Norman's own creations. Stephen explained:

Me' dad, as an engineer, with having these big sheets he used to bring back... and obviously I saw what the diagrams looked like. Again, that feeds in to some of the work that I still do. Recently I've done a residency at Durham university... in the engineering department there, I was in there for 12 months... and... the drawings that I produced there harked back to those early days.<sup>195</sup>

Norman and Stephen's testimony illustrates the limitations of confining observations into subjective experience to a particular historical moment. It shows how new dimensions can be added to historic relationships between fathers' and sons' feelings towards work with the benefit of hindsight later in life.

## Conclusion

Stephen and Norman Livingstone provide a vivid example of the intersubjective and reciprocal dynamics that characterised father-son engagements with work from childhood through to old age. As we have seen throughout this thesis, I have found it productive to think of intergenerational transmission as a 'palimpsest formed of multiple roles and identities, which can accumulate, overlap, be written over, or gradually fade away'.<sup>196</sup> Across the post-war period, fathers influenced sons through what might be described as 'labours of leisure': the transmission of a strong work ethic, oversight of practical childhood experiences of work, and symbolically, through the example they set as adult male workers within and outside the home.

However, paternal influence should be measured advisedly. Although contemporary social scientists were keen to highlight men's involvement in their children's lives after the war, the reality was in general quite different. Overtime was commonplace, and although exemplary masculine skills of craftsmanship entered family

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Pooley and Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations*, p. 15.

lives in men's practices of DIY, gardening and on holiday, much of this activity was enacted autonomously. For the most part, sons imbibed fatherly influence by osmosis, rather than through direct filial engagements. Nonetheless, once older, they nurtured an appreciation for the intrinsic value of their fathers' work, just as their fathers had nurtured similar for their own fathers' work a generation earlier. As children, however, the shape of their play owed most to personal inclination and horizontal homosocial relations. Nonetheless, they nurtured modes of adult masculinity, including practical craftsmanship, project oversight, and a spirit of adventure. As adolescents, they found new sites of cultural connection and disconnection with their fathers. They came of age to experience relatively expansive choices of work and new negotiations of their parents' legacies. When men's post-war experiences are viewed intimately, across life-courses, the social scientists' keenness to separate work from leisure might therefore be reassessed. As these father-son testimonies show, work provided powerful psychological, emotional, material and symbolic markers across generations, within and beyond the workplace, to which categories of 'instrumentalism' or intrinsic and extrinsic value only do partial justice.



# Conclusion

This dissertation has presented a social history of post-war Britain told through the emotional lives and legacies of fathers and sons. It has located these lives along the contours of historical change; however, just as importantly, it has traced men's experiences over the course of their personal biographies. Rather than view the instability and bias of memory as a barrier to historical knowledge, I have shown that it might instead present opportunities for richer and more textured understandings of the past. As Mary Jo Maynes has argued, life narratives 'provide access to individuals' claims about how their motivations and actions have been shaped by memories, emotions, imagination, and cumulative life experiences ... they thus offer a methodologically privileged location from which to view significant aspects of human agency'.<sup>1</sup> Examining the oral history testimonies of fathers and sons offers a privileged and intimate insight into aspects of their human agency in the decades following the Second World War.

As fathers and sons narrated stories of the past, relationships between cumulative life experiences and present-day perspectives have emerged. Responses to questions about their lives between 1945 and 1974 were refracted through the cultural milieu of the mid-1980s and mid-2010s. They also drew on myths and memories dating at least as far back as the 1920s, generating stories which, collectively, span nearly 100 years. They show us how, at the level of subjective experience, history is conceived of in biographical and familial terms, which span lifetimes and beyond. Oral history enabled these discussions, which covered topics ranging from holidays to homework, parenting to politics, class identity to childhood play, and marriage to divorce. I have argued, as others have, that retrospectivity and dynamic co-creation should not be seen as impediments to historical knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Rather, through consideration of the material, lifestage and socio-political contexts of interviews, as well as their narrative content,

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<sup>1</sup> Maynes, *Age as a Category of Historical Analysis*, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism' in *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (OUP, 1988); Alistair Thomson 'Unreliable Memories: The Use and Abuse of Oral History' in William Lamont and William M. Lamont (eds) *Historical Controversies and Historians* (UCL Press, 1998).

orality, and psychodynamic properties, we can arrive at intimate understandings of these aspects of social history.

Nonetheless, oral history makes particular methodological demands on the historian. Oral history is used across the humanities and social sciences, as well as among social workers, educationalists, visual artists, community historians and others. The conclusions it yields can thus be framed in a variety of disciplinary contexts. At different points in this dissertation I have found it useful to deploy certain social scientific interpretative models. For example, Graham Dawson and Alistair Thomson's understandings of 'composure', Samuel Schrager's analysis of the social in oral history, and Siân Pooley and Kaveri Qureshi's three-pronged modelling of 'generation'. However, I have not imposed any single theoretical overlay on the research. Rather, it has been my intention to retain the humanity of the subjects' stories and to orient them at all times to processes of historical change and continuity. I believe that the emotional lives of families represent promising opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement. In particular, by framing oral history life narratives as 'emotional histories' I have suggested a new perspective from which to engage with the history of emotions. With few exceptions, there has been little work to date that explores this intersection.<sup>3</sup> If the reminiscences of living people are vital sources in contemporary social history, and if we agree that those reminiscences remain in motion as they are retold, we must continue to explore the rich, dynamic nexus of subjectivity, experience and memory in the production of historical narratives.

I have argued that when we pay attention to the emotional lives and legacies of fathers and sons in this way, the teleology that sees the authoritarian Victorian patriarch gradually replaced by the modern, attentive father by the end of the 1950s requires, at the very least, qualification. Rather, it is more productive to assess filial relationships across biological lives, which see men growing closer to their children the older they became. In this respect, Pooley and Qureshi's metaphor of a palimpsest to describe the gradual layering of parenting experiences over time has great purchase.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Exceptions include Hamilton, *Moving Feelings*; Rolph and Atkinson, 'Emotion in Narrating the History of Learning Disability'.

<sup>4</sup> Pooley and Qureshi, *Parenthood Between Generations*, p. 15.

The normative pattern of fathers' relationships with their sons between 1945 and 1974 was little altered from earlier periods. Fathers had relatively little to do with their children as babies and infants, they grew more involved over the course of their childhoods and adolescences, and they took a particular interest around the time sons followed them into adulthood as breadwinners. Nonetheless, post-war performances of fatherly masculinity were wide-ranging enough to embrace tender, tactile intimacy, as well as distance and detachment, just as they had been across much of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Where aspects of post-war socio-cultural change *did* have a marked impact was in the greater range of choice and opportunity available to boys coming of age between the late 1950s and early 1970s than had been the case for their fathers' generation. These choices were most clearly manifested in experiences of education and work. Fathers' aspirations and expectations for their sons were thus required to be more flexible and open-ended, while sons' narrations were characterised by expressions of individuality and self-fulfilment. Reflecting on their respective pathways through schools, colleges and universities and into workplaces, both generations underlined the formative role of education in the construction of their adult selfhoods and familial and social relationships over time. As I have shown, education provides a valuable optic through which to assess the emotional lives and legacies of fathers and sons. Where most studies of post-war education have examined the effects of family lives on academic attainment, I have illustrated how experiences of education affected father-son relationships at home. As the Averys showed us, two working-class brothers who both failed the 11-plus could have sharply contrasting social and emotional outcomes.

If choice and opportunity in education and at work represented the sites of most significant intergenerational change, the most significant point of continuity was male breadwinning. I have argued that male breadwinning was the most pervasive mode of adult masculinity between 1945 and 1974 and the one to which all boys were expected to aspire. Despite sociologists' claims that an appreciation of the *intrinsic* value of work was reserved for the managerial classes, I have argued that fathers and sons across classes shared a mutual valorisation of work's emotional and symbolic value for men in their families across generations. Overwhelmingly, children associated their fathers'

labour with absence from family life. Yet men's work was also present in domestic spaces, appearing symbolically, materially and in the mentalities of adult and family leisure. As fathers carried out home improvements and gardened, they were routinely an *absent presence* in family life; they were physically present in and around the home, but engaged in activities undertaken alone. The material products of their craftsmanship remained as symbols of their labour, just as their skills were transposed in practices of childhood play. Where fathers' presence *was* felt, was in the generational transmission of a work ethic, in anticipation of their sons' inheritances of the male breadwinner model as adults. This manifested directly, in their engagement with children's work, and indirectly, in their inculcation of a work ethic in day-to-day life. Fatherly absence associated with work did not preclude them from engaging with their sons in myriad ways. The temporal limitations on family life imposed by the practices and mentalities of work did not preclude moments of profound filial engagement, but nor were they conducive to the role of primary caregiver. Thinking about fatherhood, work and absence in this way, helps nuance binary portrayals of fathers in modern Britain as on one hand distant, neglectful or abusive, or on the other, as warmly devoted to their families.

Absent male breadwinning was a fundamental part of what these fathers and sons considered to be the 'normal' gender ordering of domestic life. Concomitantly, day-to-day parenting was something experienced predominantly by mothers and children. Though fathers' influence grew over lifecourses, ultimate responsibility for sons' upbringings, including the instillation of good manners, discipline and oversight of education and moral guidance, remained with mothers. Where fathers remained temporally, and to varying degrees, emotionally bound their work, women were required to negotiate any workplace distractions with the overwhelming responsibilities of motherhood. Children were also active social agents in the construction of 'normal' family life. Interviewing father-son 'pairs' has underlined the way in which they negotiated, assimilated and rejected their parents' invocations. Indeed, the multidirectional nature of parenting continued to unfold across the life-course and in the dynamic of the interview situation. Fathers and sons' memories of the 'normal' family ideal have parallels to revisionist interpretations of post-war 'normality'. That is to say such experiences were often fragile and unstable – mobilised

in opposition to imagined threats to the nuclear family ideal, including homosexuality, women's labour force participation, illness, and psychological and emotional upheaval. From the 1970s onwards, not only did such threats found increasing purchase in society, they were also given voice in oral history interviews.

For working-class and socially mobile fathers, the reification of normal family life interacted with celebrations of ordinariness. Their social identities were moored to familial legacies of working-class respectability and often – but not always – broadly left-wing political worldviews. Sons of all social classes, however, were more inclined to emphasise their individuality, which manifested in processes of adaptation, continuance and repudiation of their fathers' classed and political subjectivities. In this respect, we saw a pattern of clear generational change: both fathers and sons had more in common with their generational peers than with each other. However, there was also a parallel dynamic of change across the life-courses of fathers, whose class identities and political worldviews became more patchy and inconsistent the older they became. Thus, by the time of interviewing, both generations' attitudes towards their place in society were individual and variegated. Middle-class sons tended to share their working-class and socially mobile counterparts' increasing sense of individuality; however, they were also often required to negotiate longstanding familial legacies of personal success and self-fulfilment. Such negotiations could be conflictual or harmonious, and were often mediated in inheritances of particular family cultures and forms of middle-class associational life. Only by examining the life narratives of fathers and sons from a range of social backgrounds has it been possible to trace these cross-class dynamics of intergenerational change and continuity. Concepts of 'ordinariness' and 'normality' are resonant yet elusive discursive scripts with which to unlock post-war experiences of social identity. I have illustrated their usefulness in locating subjective familial experiences across generations against wider discourses of social change.

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This dissertation was first inspired by a piece of autobiographical writing. In his co-written memoir *Many Years From Now*, Paul McCartney alighted on a particular moment of father-son interaction from 1963. He described playing his latest

composition to his father Jim, who nodded along approvingly before asking if the lyrics could be changed to read 'She loves you, *yes, yes, yes*'.<sup>5</sup> Explaining his dislike of the vernacular 'yeah', Jim lamented that there was 'enough of these Americanisms around'.<sup>6</sup> I became curious about the simultaneous notes of connection and disconnection in this interchange. On one hand, Jim's intervention underlined an irreconcilable intergenerational cultural difference; on the other, here was an upper-working-class father and son who were at some level mutually invested in the latter's creative endeavours. However, as my research progressed, I also became aware of the source's shortcomings. In common with most other autobiographies and memoirs of this period, McCartney's was a story told from the perspective of adult fame, with its incumbent stylistic and thematic biases. As Strange found for the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, most working-class autobiographers tell stories that consciously build towards adult notoriety in public life of some kind.<sup>7</sup> In the post-war period, autobiographies of working-class people are even more likely to be told from the perspective of adult celebrity.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, I decided that to write an emotional history of generational relationships in families I should privilege sources that give voice to both generations in roughly equal measure.<sup>9</sup> I also wanted a sample size that allowed for an intimate analysis of each of the relationships in the different chapter settings. For these reasons, I decided to eschew altogether, or use only selectively, autobiography, as well as other life narrative sources.

Notwithstanding the methodological challenges of using autobiography, biography and memoir for the post-war period, there remains largely untapped potential in using this type of source to write a history of non-white-British parenting

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<sup>5</sup> Miles, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*, (Secker & Warburg, 1997), p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, any exposition of a life narrative is performative. However, the authorial voice in celebrity autobiography and memoir is often especially preoccupied with its public audience. For the post-war period, the category of 'working-class autobiography', often drawn upon to document 'ordinary' lives in earlier periods, is less well-formed. The exception is community publishing; see for example, Jones, *The Uses of Nostalgia*.

<sup>9</sup> Julie-Marie Strange has demonstrated the rich potential of autobiography for uncovering emotional lives. However, the sources tend to privilege the voice of the adult-child reflecting on her or his upbringing. See Richard Hall, 'Love, Toil, Laughter, and Devotion' in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 21 (2016).

experiences.<sup>10</sup> In the introduction I alluded to some of the potential intellectual and methodological problems with writing a history of fathers and sons that crossed racial categories, as well as those of class. As some of the scholarship that has explored parenting in post-war migrant communities has shown, such experiences were heterogeneous, both at the level of subjective experience and with reference to the particular ethnic traditions and conventions to which they belong. Minority ethnic parenting experiences were also commonly shaped by their responses to white-British prejudice and discrimination. As Punita Showbey and Sarah Salway have shown, migration, minoritisation and employment experiences created particular conditions for South Asian fatherhood in post-war Britain.<sup>11</sup> Joanna Herbert has argued that in East African Asian migrant families, powerlessness and racism in society can lead to men asserting a dominant masculine role in families, wherein male authority and female subordination is culturally normative.<sup>12</sup> Janet McKenley has shown how childhood experiences of institutional racism in the education system has informed black Caribbean migrant fathers' attitudes towards their own children's schooling.<sup>13</sup> Among the scholars who have looked at post-war mothers' perspectives, Louise Ryan has examined the circumstances of Irish and black working women, who faced the double prejudice of racism and accusations of negligent motherhood.<sup>14</sup> Recent interventions by Lucy Bland and Anna MacGuire have addressed the stigma of 'brown babies' for war-time and post-war white mothers in interracial partnerships.<sup>15</sup> As Venetia Evergeti has suggested, as family-related migration – alongside economically-motivated migration – has increased, scholars have become more drawn to intersubjective experiences of migrant family life. However, whatever the circumstances of migration, there remains

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Floella Benjamin and Michael Frith, *Coming to England* (Pavilion, 1995); Hanif Kureishi, *My Ear at his Heart: Reading my Father* (Faber, 2004); David Lammy, *Out of the Ashes: Britain After the Riots* (Guardian, 2011); Lewis, *From Deepest Kilburn*.

<sup>11</sup> Chowbey and Salway, *I Feel My Dad Every Moment!*, p. 230.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert, *Masculinity and Migration*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>13</sup> McKenley, *Seven Black Men*, p. xiv.

<sup>14</sup> Louise Ryan, 'Becoming Nurses: Irish Women, Migration and Identity Through the Life Course' in Ryan and Wendy Webster (eds) *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-war Britain* (Ashgate, 2008), pp. 29-30.

<sup>15</sup> Lucy Bland, 'Interracial Relationships and the "Brown Baby Question": Black GIs, White British Women and their Mixed Race Offspring in World War II' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 26 (2017); Anna Macguire, 'You Wouldn't Want Your Daughter Marrying One': Parental Intervention into Mixed Race Relationships in Post-War Britain (2018), *Life-Cycles Seminar*, Insitute of Historical Research.

relatively little book-length historical enquiries into minority ethnic experiences of post-war parenting.<sup>16</sup>

Greater engagement with these histories would offer insight into the relationship between post-war parenting and whiteness as a lens through which to assess social identity. Wendy Webster has traced a discourse across this period that saw a shift from an inclusive 'people's Empire', designed to ameliorate public opinion about colonial immigration, towards 'siege narratives' that positioned white Englishness as a site of racial identity in opposition to unwelcome 'others'.<sup>17</sup> As Bill Schwarz has argued, the proximity of black migrants to white workers in the post-war disrupted Britons' collective amnesia about colonialism and led to 'racial whiteness' as a site of identity politics and political mobilisation – most famously and controversially expressed in Conservative MP Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968.<sup>18</sup> Yet, beyond the occasional remark, the subjects of race and ethnicity were conspicuous by their absence in my father-son testimonies. In general, enquiries into views about immigration were met with neutral responses. Certainly, considerations of race and ethnicity did not impact on reflections on their relationships with each other. Nor, for example, was there any evidence of imagined threats from West Indian or Asian codes of masculinity to normative white British racial identities.<sup>19</sup> However, equally, there was little consciousness of white-British identity as an economic and social privilege. Given patterns of rising immigration, prolonged spells of economic uncertainty, de-industrialisation and post-industrialisation since the end of my period, intersections between whiteness, work and masculinity have become increasing pressing areas of historical enquiry.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the political and social divisions surrounding

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<sup>16</sup> Venetia Evergeti 'Notions of 'Home' and Belonging Among Greeks in the UK' in Ryan and Webster (eds) *Gendering Migration*, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (OUP, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (OUP, 2013), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Marcus Collins, 'Pride and Prejudice - West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain' in *Journal of British Studies*, 40 p. 170.

<sup>20</sup> Existing scholarship includes, for example, Simon J. Charlesworth, *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience* (CUP, 1999); Luis Jimenez and Valerie Walkerdine, 'A Psychosocial Approach to Shame, Embarrassment and Melancholia Amongst Unemployed Young Men and their Fathers' in *Gender and Education*, 23 (2011).



Brexit, oral history would be a powerful methodology with which to engage with men's experiences of these dynamics.<sup>21</sup>

It is likely that religion would have emerged as a more prominent theme in any study of post-war ethnic minority father-son relationships. As we have seen, the subjects of my research have offered glimpses into experiences of Christianity at the precipice of substantial decline in church attendance.<sup>22</sup> I have touched briefly on themes including the sustenance of semi-formal religious cultures in Sunday Schools and the Scout movement, and the latent influence of feminine piety in the moral aspects of everyday parenting practices. As the Birchwoods' longstanding pan-generational connection with the Scouts illustrated, subjective experiences of Christianity in quasi-religious associational and institutional settings could still profoundly affect family life, well into the twenty-first century. Such experiences nuance, if not dispel altogether, empiricist British Anglican secularisation narratives.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, life-long atheist Mike Saddington's attraction to the church, following his wife's death in the early 2000s. Recent work by Callum Brown has used oral history to trace the gendering of 'no-religionism' across the mid to late-twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> More research into, for example, black Pentecostalist, Muslim, Hindu or Irish Catholic families, would provide useful counterpoints and allow us to assess more comprehensively the place for religion in gendered experiences of post-war family life.<sup>25</sup>

For many families in post-war Britain, the most significant engagements with the church – generally female-led – were the rituals surrounding births, marriages and

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<sup>21</sup> On the relationship between Brexit, immigration and social experience, see, for example, *Brexit: The Result of Rising Inequality, not Rising Immigration*, 2018, <http://www.dannydorling.org/?p=6373> [Accessed July 2018]; Robert Ford and Marththew Goodwin, 'Britain after Brexit' in *Journal of Democracy*, 28 (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Religion and Society* p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> For critiques of Callum Brown's secularisation thesis and the post-war growth of non-Anglican religions, see Jeremy Morris, 'The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularization Debate' in *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003); John Wolffe (2007) 'Religion and 'Secularisation'' in Carnevali and Strange (eds) *Twentieth-Century Britain*.

<sup>24</sup> Callum Brown (2013) 'Men Losing Faith: The Making of Modern No-Religionism in the UK, 1939-2010' in Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan (eds) *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Palgrave, 2013)

<sup>25</sup> For an enquiry into post-war middle-class male Catholicism, see Alana Harris *ibid.* "The People of God Dressed for Dinner and Dancing'? English Catholic Masculinity, Religious Sociability and the Catenian Association'.

deaths.<sup>26</sup> Correspondingly, the sharp rise in the divorce rate from the early 1970s has contributed persuasively to the discourse of late-twentieth century secularisation.<sup>27</sup> It is no more than coincidence that the only divorce that emerged in my father-son testimonies was that of a vicar's daughter, Peter Wilkins' wife. However, it was also interesting to note the ongoing geo-social significance of the village church to the father-son relationship. Although divorce appears in the margins of key texts on twentieth century British social history, none has yet offered a sustained enquiry into subjective experiences of divorce before or after the landmark 1969 Divorce Act.<sup>28</sup> Of the relatively small historiography catering specifically to divorce, most literature tends to cluster around legal history, population studies and religious history.<sup>29</sup> However, as the Wilkins' story suggests, there is potential to use divorce as a prism through which to view narratives of gender, class, emotions and religion in family life.

In summary, there remains considerable ground yet to be covered in the social and emotional history of post-war family life. Here, I have just touched on just a handful of potential avenues for further enquiry arising out of the present study. Since beginning this project more than four years ago, the subject of masculinity has, once again, been thrust into the cultural spotlight. A number of aggressive, sexist male public figures have been variously shamed and empowered and #metoo has acquired discursive potency on a global scale.<sup>30</sup> As a compelling panel at 2017's Modern British History conference in Birmingham demonstrated, the gender politics of academic workplaces are far from immune to conscious and unconscious exertions of male

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<sup>26</sup> Brown, *Religion and Society* pp. 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Cohen, *Family Secrets*; Collins, *Modern Love*; Langhamer, *The English in Love*; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*.

<sup>29</sup> On legal history see J. M. Binner and A. W. Dnes, 'Marriage, Divorce, and Legal Change: New Evidence from England and Wales' in *Economic Inquiry*, 39 (2001). On religious history see Neil Armstrong, 'Divorce and the English Clergy c.1970-1990' in *Twentieth Century British History*, 26 (2015); Jane Lewis and Patrick Wallis, 'Fault, Breakdown, and the Church of England's Involvement in the 1969 Divorce Reform' *ibid.* 11 (2000). On population studies see Kathleen E. Kiernan and Andrew J. Cherlin, 'Parental divorce and partnership dissolution in adulthood: Evidence from a British cohort study' in *Population Studies*, 53 (1999); R. Schoen and J. Baj, 'Twentieth-Century Cohort Marriage and Divorce in England and Wales' *ibid.* 38 (1984).

<sup>30</sup> On #metoo and the contemporary cultures of toxic masculinity, see, for example, *Men after #MeToo: 'There's a narrative that masculinity is fundamentally toxic'* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/09/men-after-metoo-masculinity-fundamentally-toxic>. [Accessed July 2018]; Emma Lundin and Charlotte Lydia Riley, #metoo, Tomorrow Never Knows Podcast (October 2018), <https://www.tomorrowneverknowspod.com/>

power.<sup>31</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, the Women's Liberation Movement inspired anti-sexist men to reflect on their subjective responses to feminism and the patriarchy;<sup>32</sup> it might be a productive cultural and intellectual moment for male historians of masculinity in the late 2010s to reflect on similar emotional processes. I have shown in this dissertation one way of illuminating male intergenerational subjectivities from the mid-twentieth century to the present-day – through the intersubjective encounters of oral history interviews about family lives. I am confident that further research into the contemporary history of masculinity will continue to helpfully shape our conception of men and boys as social agents today.

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<sup>31</sup> For more details, see. Richard Hall, *A Male voice in a Female Chorus*, 2018, [https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/2017/08/#\\_ftn1](https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/2017/08/#_ftn1) [Accessed November 2018]

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# Appendix

## Questionnaire – New Oral History Interviews

### Note

The interviews followed a 'semi-structured' format, guided by the topics included in the questionnaire. Full ethical approval was obtained, and all interviewees were sent copies of the transcribed interviews, with the opportunity to edit or comment on their answers.

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### Preliminary questions

- When were you were born?
- Where did you live between 1945 and 1974? (street(s) and town(s))
- Who lived with you? (brothers, sisters, grandparents etc.)
- What did you/your parents do for a living?
- Which school/s did you go to?
- If you had pick one thing of particular importance to you from that period what would it be? (e.g. a film, TV or radio programme, piece of music, photograph, personal letter)

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## Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in my project. As you know, I will be recording the interview, but please try to ignore the audio recorder – it just allows me to focus on listening to your memories rather than making copious notes. The idea is to have a relaxed conversation, not a formal question and answer session. The most important thing to remember is that I'm interested *your* memories and feelings about the 1950s and 1960s. There are lots of books written about this period but none have really focused on the experiences of fathers and sons – so there are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to elaborate on any points you think are important. I'll have an eye on the clock, so if I think we need to move on to the next topic at any stage, I'll just let you know.

## Home and Family

### 1. Describe your home

*Prompt – rooms, furniture, decorations, garden, appliances, TV/radio... how did your home make you feel? Any objects you particularly remember?*

### 2. Describe your family

*Prompt – family size? work and leisure interests? Would you consider yourselves 'typical'? Any funny/sad stories? How did you feel about your family?*

### 3. Describe the relationship you had with your other family members

*Prompt – family roles and duties, shared experiences and interests, affection, distance, terms of endearment?*

*Prompt – in particular, the relationship with your father/son... close/distant, shared activities?*

4. [Presuming fathers were married and cohabiting]
- a) Can you describe meeting your wife, courtship and getting married. How did you begin to think about starting a family? Who/what was most help to you when you became a father? (fathers only)
  - b) Did your role as a parent differ from your wife's? (fathers only)  
*Prompt – Discipline? Education? Breadwinning? Care-giving? Cooking and cleaning? Nappy-changing? Pram-pushing? Playing? How did you feel about fatherhood?*
  - c) Thinking about experiences as a son, did your father's role as a parent differ from your mother's? (sons only)  
*Prompt – Discipline? Education? Breadwinning? Care-giving? Cooking and cleaning? Playing? How did you feel about childhood? How would you describe your relationship with your father?*
5. a) What were your hopes for your children's futures? (fathers only)  
*Prompt – Work? Education? Locality? Family size? Is there anything you wanted to 'hand down'? Material? Ways of life? Different for sons/daughters?*
- b) Do you think your father/mother had any specific hopes for your future? (sons only)  
*Prompt – Work? Education? Locality? Family size? Is there anything you wanted to 'hand down'? Material? Ways of life? Different for brothers/sisters?*
6. Do you think your generation was different from your parents' generation?  
*Prompt – Parenting styles? Work? Leisure interests? Affluence?*
7. How did the household finances work?  
*Prompt - Who contributed? Who managed the budget?*

Work, Leisure and Education

8. Describe a typical weekday and weekend day in your childhood/adulthood.  
*Prompt – focus on detail – time awake, food eaten, clothes, travel, company etc.*

9. Did you ever take holidays with your family? If so, where did you go?

*Prompt – Describe where you stayed, what you did, who with?*

10. What did you do in your free time?

*Prompt – Sport? Cinema/radio/TV/theatre? Books? Comics? Pubs? youth clubs? boys' groups? Bars? Church? hobbies?*

*Prompt - Where were you? Who with? Did you enjoy it?*

11. Tell me about your friends

*Prompt – How many? Close circle? How often did you see them? What did you do together? Where did you meet? Why did you like them?*

a) Describe your school (sons only)

*Prompt – the building, play area (what/how did you play?), journey to and from, homework, teachers, favourite subject, uniform, A-Levels? University?*

b) Describe your job (fathers only)

*Prompt – the working environment, fellow workers, journey to and from. Member of a Union? Did you enjoy it? Difference between your father's and your son's jobs?*

### Culture, Politics and Society

12. Were you, your family or friends interested in politics or current affairs? What were the big political issues of the day and where did you stand?

*Prompt (only if comfortable) – Political allegiance? Did you read a newspaper? What were your views on immigration? Homosexuality? Religion? Equality for women?*

13. What do you remember about the music, films and fashions of the period?

*Prompt - Were they things you/your friends engaged with? What clothes did you wear? What did you watch/listen to? What made you laugh?*

14. How would you describe yourself during this time?

*Prompt – A loner? Rebellious? Conformist? Typical man/child/teenager?*

General

14. Discussion of 'particular thing' from preliminary questions

15. Do you think you have changed since those days?

*Prompt – relationships with family? friends? political outlook?*

16. How would you sum up the period 1945-1974

*Prompt – A happy time? Difficult time? Why?*

17. How did you feel the interview went? Is there anything you'd like to add?